

# THE ARGONAUTS



ELIZA ORZESZKO

1880  
+ 17  
1897

65  
Margaret Rudolph,  
Edward and Wickes Aves.,  
Brooklyn, N. Y.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2008 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation











# THE ARGONAUTS



UNIV. OF CALIF. LIBRARY, LOS ANGELES

# THE ARGONAUTS

BY

ELIZA ORZESZKO

TRANSLATED FROM THE POLISH BY

JEREMIAH CURTIN

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1901



COPYRIGHT, 1901, BY  
JEREMIAH CURTIN

---

*All rights reserved*

TROW DIRECTORY  
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY  
NEW YORK

## INTRODUCTORY

Eliza Orzeszko, the authoress of "The Argonauts," is the greatest female writer and thinker in the Slav world at present. There are keen and good critics, just judges of thought and style, who pronounce her the first literary artist among the women of Europe.

These critics are not Western Europeans, for Western Europe has no means yet of appreciating this gifted woman. No doubt it will have these means after a time in the form of adequate translations. Meanwhile I repeat that she is the greatest authoress among all the Slav peoples. She is a person of rare intellectual distinction, an observer of exquisite perception in studying men and women, and the difficulties with which they have to struggle.

Who are the Slavs among whom Eliza Orzeszko stands thus distinguished?

The Slavs form a very large majority of the people in Austria-Hungary, an immense majority in European Turkey, and an overwhelming majority in the Russian Empire; they are besides an unyielding, though repressed, majority in that part of Prussian territory known as Posen in German, and Poznan in Polish.

The Slav race occupies an immense region extending from Prussia, Bohemia, and the Adriatic eastward to the Pacific Ocean. Its main divisions are the Russians, Poles, Bohemians (Chehs), Serbs, Bulgarians; its smaller divisions are the Slovaks, Wends, Slovinians, Croats, Montenegrins.

These all have literature in some form, literature which in respect to the world outside is famous, well known, little known, or unknown.

The Slavs have behind them a history dramatic to the utmost, varied, full of suffering, full also of heroism in endurance or valor.

The present time is momentous for all nations, the future is a tangled riddle; for the Slavs this seems true in a double measure. To involved social problems is added race opposition in the breasts of neighbors, a deep, sullen historic hostility. Hence when a writer of power appears among the Slavs, whether he takes up the past or the present, he has that at hand through which he compels the whole world to listen. Sienkiewicz has shown this, so has Tolstoy, so have Dostoyevski and Gogol.

The present volume gives in translation a book which should be widely read with much pleasure. The winning of money on an immense scale to the neglect of all other objects, to the neglect even of the nearest duties, is the sin of one Argonaut; the utter neglect of money and the proper means of living is the ruin of the other.

Darvid by "iron toil" laid the basis of a splendid structure, but went no farther; he had not the time, he had not the power, perhaps, to build thereon himself, and his wife, to whom he left the task, had not the character to do so. By neglect of duty Darvid is brought to madness; by neglect of money Kranitski is brought to be a parasite, and when he loses even that position he is supported by a servant.

The right use of wealth, the proper direction of labor, these are supreme questions in our time, and beyond all in America.

Friends have advised Madame Orzeszko to visit this coun-

try and study it; visit Chicago, the great business centre, the most active city on earth, and New York, the great money capital. If she comes she will see much to rouse thought. What will she see? That we know how to win money and give proper use to it? Whatever she sees, it will be something of value, that is undoubted; something that may be compared with European conditions, something to be compared with the story in this book.

Eliza Orzeszko writes because she cannot help writing; her works, contained in forty-odd volumes, touch on the most vital subjects in the world about her. She tells the truth precisely as she sees it. We may hope for much yet from the pen of this lady, who is still in the best years of her intellectual activity.

Madame Orzeszko was born a little more than fifty years ago in Lithuania, that part of the Commonwealth which produced Mickiewicz,<sup>1</sup> the great poet, and Kosciuszko<sup>2</sup> the hero.

JEREMIAH CURTIN.

BRISTOL, VT., U. S. A.,  
*September 12, 1901.*

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Mitskévitch; the e as ai in vain.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounced Kotsúshko; the u as oo in boot.



# THE ARGONAUTS

## CHAPTER I

It was the mansion of a millionaire. On the furniture and the walls of drawing-rooms, colors and gleams played as on the surface of a pearl shell. Mirrors reflected pictures, and inlaid floors shone like mirrors. Here and there dark tapestry and massive curtains seemed to decrease the effect, but only at first sight, for, in fact, they lent the whole interior a dignity which was almost churchlike. At some points everything glistened, gleamed, changed into azure, scarlet, gold, bronze, and the various tints of white peculiar to plaster-of-Paris, marble, silk, porcelain. In that house were products of Chinese and Japanese skill; the styles of remote ages were there, and the most exquisite and elegant among modern styles, lamps, chandeliers, candlesticks, vases, ornamental art in its highest development. Withal much taste and skill was evident, a certain tact in placing things, and a keenness in disposing them, which indicated infallibly the hand and the mind of a woman who was far above mediocrity.

The furnishing of this mansion must have cost sums which to the poor would seem colossal, and very considerable even to the wealthy.

Aloysius Darvid, the owner of this mansion, had not inherited his millions; he had won them with his own iron labor, and he toiled continually to increase them. His in-

## The Argonauts

dustry, inventiveness, and energy were inexhaustible. To him business seemed to be what water is to a fish: the element which gives delight and freedom. What was his business? Great and complicated enterprises: the erection of public edifices, the purchase, sale, and exchange of values of various descriptions, exchanges in many markets and corporations. To finish all this business it was necessary to possess qualities of the most opposite character: the courage of the lion and the caution of the fox, the talons of the falcon and the elasticity of the cat. His life was passed at a gaming-table, composed of the whole surface of a gigantic State; that life was a species of continuous punting at a bank kept by blind chance rather frequently; for calculation and skill, which meant very much in his career, could not eliminate chance altogether, that power which appears independently. Hence, he must not let chance overthrow him; he might drop to the earth before its thrusts and contract a muscle, but only to parry, make an elastic spring, and seize new booty. His career was success rising and falling like a river, it was also a fever, ceaselessly bathed in cool calculation and reckoning.

As to the rest, post-wagons, railways, bells at railway stations, urging to haste, glittering snows of the distant North, mountains towering on the boundary between two parts of the world, rivers cutting through uninhabited regions, horizons marked with the gloomy lines of Siberian forests, solitary since the beginning of ages. Then, as a change: noise, glitter, throngs, the brilliancy of capitals, and in those capitals a multitude of doors, some of which open with freedom, while others are closed hermetically; before doors of the second sort the pliancy of the cat's paw is needed; this finds a hole where the broad way is impossible.



## The Argonauts

He was forced to be absent from his family for long months, sometimes for whole years, and even when living under the same roof with the members of it he was a rare guest, never a real confiding companion. For permanence, intimacy, tender feeling in relations, with even those who were nearest him, Darvid had not the time, just as he had not the time to concentrate his thoughts on any subject whatever unless it was connected with his lines, dates, and figures, or with the meshes of that net in which he enclosed his thoughts and his iron labor.

As to amusements and delights of life, they were at intervals love-affairs, flashing up on a sudden, transient, fleeting, vanishing with the smoke of the locomotive which rushed forward, at times luxuries of the table peculiar to various climates, or majestic scenery which forced itself on the eye by its grandeur and disappeared quickly, or some hours of animated card-playing; but, above all, relations with social magnates, who were on the one hand of use, and on the other an immensely great honor to his vanity. Money and significance, these were the two poles around which all Darvid's thoughts, desires, and feelings circled; or, at least, it might seem all, for who can be certain that nothing exists in a man save that which is manifest in his actions? Surely no one, not the man himself even.

After three years' absence, Darvid had returned only a few months before to his native city, and to his own house, where he was as ever a rare and inattentive guest. He was laboring again. In the first week, on the first day almost, he discovered a new field; he was very anxious to seize this field, and begin his Herculean efforts on it. But the seizure depended on a certain very highly placed personage to whom, up to that time, he had not been able to gain admittance.

## The Argonauts

The cat's paw had played about a number of times to open a crevice in the closed door, but in vain! He desired a confidential talk of two hours, but could not obtain it. He turned then to a method which had given him real service frequently.

He found an individual who had the art of squeezing into all places, of winning everyone, of digging from under the earth circumstances, relations, influences. Individuals of this kind are generally dubious in character, but this concerned Darvid in no way. He considered that at the bottom of life dregs are found as surely as slime is in rivers which have golden sand. He thought of life's dregs and smiled contemptuously, but did not hesitate to handle those dregs, and see if there were golden grains in them. He called his dubious assistants hounds, for they tracked game in thickets inaccessible to the hunter. Small, almost invisible, they were still better able than he to contract muscles, creep up or spring over. He had let out such a hound a few days before to gain the desired audience, and had received no news from him thus far. This disturbed and annoyed Darvid greatly. He would rush into the new work like a lion into an arena, and spring at fresh prey.

The evening twilight came down into the series of great and small chambers. Darvid, in his study, furnished with such dignified wealth that it was almost severe in the rich lamp-light, received men who came on affairs of various descriptions: with reports, accounts, requests, proposals.

In that study everything was dark-colored, massive, grand in its proportions, of great price, but not flashy. Not the least object was showy or fantastic; nothing was visible save dignity and comfort. There were books behind the glass of a splendid bookcase, two great pictures on the wall, a desk with piles of papers, in the middle of the room a

## The Argonauts

round table covered with maps, pamphlets, thick volumes; around the table, heavy, deep and low armchairs. The room was spacious with a lofty ceiling, from which hung over the round table a splendid lamp, burning brightly.

Darvid's remote prototype, the Argonaut Jason, must have had quite a different exterior when he sailed on toward Colchis to find the golden fleece. Time, which changes the methods of contest, changes the forms of its knights correspondingly. Jason trusted in the strength of his arm and his sword-blade. Darvid trusted in his brain and his nerves only. Hence, in him, brain and nerves were developed to the prejudice of muscles, creating a special power, which one had to know in order to recognize it in that slender and not lofty figure, in that face with shrunken cheeks, covered with skin which was dry, pale, and as mobile as if quivering from every breeze which carried his bark toward the shores which he longed for. On his cheeks shone narrow strips of whiskers, almost bronze-hued; the silky ends of these fell on his stiff, low collar; ruddy mustaches, short and firm, darkened his pale, thin lips, which had a smile in the changeableness of which was great expression; this smile encouraged, discouraged, attracted, repelled, believed, doubted, courted or jeered—jeered frequently. But the main seat of power in Darvid seemed to be his eyes, which rested long and attentively on that which he examined. These eyes had pupils of steel color, cold, very deep, and with a fulness of penetrating light which was often sharp, under brows which were prominent, whose ruddy lines were drawn under a high forehead, increased further by incipient baldness—a forehead which was smooth and had the polish of ivory; between the brows were numerous wrinkles, like a cloud of anxiety and care. His was a cold, reasoning face, energetic, with the stamp of thought

## The Argonauts

fixed between the brows, and lines of irony which had made the mouth drawn.

A jurist, one of the most renowned in that great city, held in his hand an open volume of the Code, and was reading aloud a series of extracts from it. Darvid was standing and listening attentively, but irony increased in his smile, and, when the jurist stopped reading, he began in a low voice. This voice with its tones suppressed, as it were, through caution, was one of Darvid's peculiarities.

"Pardon me, but what you have read has no relation to the point which concerns us."

Taking the book he turned over its pages for a while and began then to read from it. In reading he used glasses with horn-rims; from these the yellowish pallor of his lean face became deeper. The renowned jurist was confused and astonished.

"You are right," said he. "I was mistaken. You know law famously."

How was he to avoid knowing it, since it was his weapon and safety-valve!

The jurist sat down on one of the broad and low arm-chairs in silence, and now the architect unrolled on the table the plan of a public edifice to which the last finish was to be given during winter and before work began in spring.

Darvid listened again in silent thought, looking at the plan with his steel-colored eyes, in which at times there flashed sparks of ideas coming from the brain—ideas which, after a while, he presented to the trained architect. He spoke in a voice low and fluent; he spoke connectedly and very clearly. The architect answered with respect, and, like, the jurist who had preceded, not without a certain astonishment. Great God! this man knows everything; he moves as freely in the fields of architecture, mathematics, and law

## The Argonauts

as in his own chamber! Darvid noticed the astonishment of those around him, and irony settled on his thin lips. Did those men imagine that he could begin such undertakings and be like a blind man among colors? Some begin thus but are ruined! He understood that in our time immense knowledge is the only foundation for pyramidal fortunes, and his memory alone knew the long series of nights which had passed above his head while it was sleepless in winning knowledge.

Next appeared before the table a young man, lean and slender; his dark eyes expressed genius, his clothing was threadbare, his gestures almost vulgar. This was a sculptor, young but already famous. The man had incipient consumption, which brought excessive ruddiness to his face, a glitter to his eyes, and a short, rasping cough from his breast. He spoke of the sculptures which he was to finish for the edifices reared by the great contractor; he showed the drawings of them, and explained his ideas; he rose to enthusiasm; he spoke more loudly, and coughed at more frequent intervals. Darvid raised his head; the sensitive skin on his cheeks quivered with a delicate movement; he touched the shoulder of the artist with the tips of two white, slender fingers.

“Rest,” said he; “it hurts you to speak too long.”

“My younger daughter coughs in just this way,” remarked he to the other men present, “and it troubles me somewhat.”

“Perhaps a visit to Italy,” said the architect.

“Yes, I have thought of that, but the doctors note nothing dangerous so far.”

Then he turned to the sculptor:

“You ought to visit Italy, for its collections of art and—its climate.”

## The Argonauts

The artist, not pleased with this interruption, did not answer directly, but went on showing his projects and explaining them; though his short breath and the cough, which was repeated oftener, made his conversation more difficult. Thereupon Darvid straightened himself.

"I know very little of art," said he. "Not because I despise it; on the contrary, I think art a power, since the world does it homage, but because I lack time. Trouble yourself no further to exhibit plans and ideas here. I confirm them beforehand, knowing well what I do. Prince Zeno, whose good taste and intellect I admire, advised me to turn to you. At his house, moreover, I have seen works of your chisel which charmed me. Some declare that we men of finance and business represent only matter, and have no concern with Psyche (the soul). But I say that your Psyche, now in Prince Zeno's palace, produced on me the impression that I am not matter only."

Irony covered his lips, but with increased amiability he added:

"Let us fix the amount of your honorarium, permit me to take the initiative," said he, hurriedly.

In a tone of inquiry he mentioned a sum which was very considerable. The sculptor bowed, unwilling, or unable to conceal his delight and astonishment. Darvid touched him lightly on the arm, and conducted him to a great desk, one drawer of which he opened. The jurist and the architect at the round table exchanged glances.

"A protégé of the prince!" whispered one.

"Cleverness! advertising!" whispered the other.

"I know from report," said Darvid, to the young artist, "that sculptors must spend considerable sums before they begin a given work. Here is an advance. Do not hesitate. Money should be at the service of talent."



## The Argonauts

The sculptor was astonished. He had imagined the millionaire as entirely different.

"Money should be at the service of talent!" repeated he. "I hear this for the first time from a man having money! Do you really think so?"

Darvid smiled, but his face clouded immediately.

"My dear sir," said he, "I would give, I think, much money if a cough like yours were not in the world."

"Because of your daughter—" began the sculptor, but Darvid had grown cold now, ceremonious, and he turned toward the round table.

At the same moment a servant announced from the door a new guest.

"Pan Arthur Kranitski."

The guest entered immediately after the servant, and passed the outgoing sculptor in the door.

This guest was a man who carried his fifth decade of years with youthful elasticity of movement, and with a pleasant, winning expression on his still handsome face. In general he seemed to be clothed with remnants of great manly beauty, from behind which, like soiled lining through rents in a once splendid robe, appeared, carefully concealed, old age, which was premature, perhaps.

A tall man with a shapely oval face, he had dark whiskers, and the black curls of his hair did not cover successfully the bald spot appearing on the back of his head; his mustache was curled upward, in the fashion of young men, above ruddy lips; he passed through the study with a youthful step, and had the express intention of greeting the master of the house in a cordial and intimate manner. But in the cold eyes of Darvid appeared flashes well-nigh threatening; he barely touched with his finger-tips the hand extended by the guest—a hand really aristocratic, white, slender, and greatly cared for.



## The Argonauts

"Pardon, pardon, dear Pan Aloysius, that I come at this hour, just the hour of thy important, immense, colossal occupations! But on receiving thy invitation I hastened."

"Yes," said Darvid, "I need to talk with you a little—will you wait a while?"

He turned toward the two men standing by the table, who when he greeted Kranitski looked at him with a curiosity impossible to conceal.

Every meeting of Darvid with that eternal guest, that offshoot of aristocratic families, roused the curiosity of people. For a good while Darvid did not know this, but at last he discovered it, and now his quick glance caught on the lips of the famous jurist a barely discernible smile, to meet which a similar smile appeared on the lips of the architect. He discoursed a few minutes more with the two men. When they turned to go he conducted them to the door; when that was closed he turned to Kranitski and said:

"Now I am at your service."

No one had ever seen service so icy cold, and having in it the shade of a restrained threat. Kranitski in view of this spent more time than was needed in placing his hat on one of the pieces of furniture, besides an expression of alarm covered his face, now bent forward, and, in the twinkle of an eye, the wrinkling of his forehead and the dropping of his cheeks, made him look ten years older. Still with grace which was unconscious, since it had passed long before into habit, he turned to Darvid.

"Thou hast written to me, dear Pan Aloysius——"

"I have called you," interrupted Darvid, "for the purpose of proposing a certain condition, and a change."

From a thick, long book he cut out a page, on which, previously, he had written a few words in haste, and giving it to Kranitski, he said:

## The Argonauts

"Here is a bank check for a considerable sum. Your affairs, as I hear, are in a very disagreeable condition."

Kranitski's face grew radiant from delight, and became ten years younger. Taking the check presented to him he began, with a certain hesitation:

"Dear Pan Aloysius, this service, really friendly, which thou art rendering me, even without request on my part, is truly magnanimous, but be assured that the moment income from my property increases——"

Darvid interrupted him a second time.

"We know each other so long that I cannot be ignorant of what your property is, and what income you receive from it. You have no property. You own a little village, the income from which has never sufficed to satisfy even one-half of your needs. In that little village you would have passed your life unknown to the great world if your mother had not been a relative of Prince Zeno, and some other coronets of nine quarterings. But since you had relationship so brilliant through your mother, high society did not suffer from the loss of your presence. I know all that relates to you, you need not try to lead me into error—I know everything."

On the last words he put an emphasis which seemed to bring Kranitski into a profound confusion, which he could not master.

"*Parole d'honneur*," began he, "I do not understand such a real friendly service with such a tone."

"You will understand at once. This sum offered you is not a friendly service, but a simple commercial transaction. To begin with, I insist that for the future you cut short all relations with my son Maryan."

Kranitski stepped back a number of paces.

"With Maryan!" exclaimed he, as if not wishing to

## The Argonauts

believe his own ears. "I break all relations with him! Is it possible? Why? How can that be? But you yourself——"

"That is true, I myself began this. I wished that my family, which, during my frequent absences, resided here permanently, should move in that social sphere which I considered most desirable, and I asked you to be the link between my family and that sphere——"

"I did what you desired," interrupted Kranitski in turn, and raising his head.

Darvid, looking firmly into his face, said in a low voice, slowly, but the ice of his tones seemed at moments to break from the boiling of passion confined beneath them.

"Yes, but you, sir, have demoralized my son. Of himself he would never have gone to such a degree of corruption and idleness. You drew him from study, you led him into all kinds of sport, you took him to all places of amusement, from the highest to the lowest. On returning, after three years' absence, I found Maryan withered morally. Luckily he is a child yet, twenty-three years of age, it is possible to save him. The process of salvation I begin by forbidding you to have any further relations whatever with my son."

Darvid grew terrible during his remaining words. His fingers were sinking into the table, on which he rested his hand. The cluster of wrinkles between his brows became deeper, his eyes had the flash of steel in them; he was all hatred, anger, contempt. But Kranitski, who at first listened to him as if unable to move from astonishment, boiled up also with anger.

"What do you say?" cried he. "Does not my hearing deceive me? You reproach me! Me, who during your ceaseless occupations and absences have been for many

## The Argonauts

years, one may say, the only guardian of your family, and director of your son. Well! Then do you not remember our former intimacy, and this, that it was I who made you acquainted with the highest families of this city, and all this country? Do you not remember your confidential statements to me that you wished to give your daughters in marriage within those circles to which my connections might be a convenient bridge for you? Do you not remember your requests that I should introduce Maryan into the best society, and teach him the manners prevailing there? Very well! You were making your millions in peace, going after them to the ends of the earth, while I did everything that you wished, and now I meet with reproaches, which, at the very least, are expressed without delicacy—*des reproches, des grossièretés*—*Mais ça n'a pas de nom! c'est inouï!* This demands the satisfaction of honor.”

His indignation was genuine and heartfelt; it brought out a deep flush on his still shapely face. A stony amazement fell on Darvid. True, true, that man spoke the truth. He, Darvid, had used him for his purposes; he had liked the man, almost loved him; he had given him great confidence. He had not looked into his character; he had not tried to know him, though he had found time to analyze and know men who took no part in his business. But the fact in this case was, that whatever had happened, had happened with his own will. From the depth of his bosom, from out their mysterious den, came a coil of snakes, and a repulsive coldness and slime rose toward his throat, still he reared his head.

“There is much truth in what you say; still my decisive and repeated wish is that you cease to appear in my house.”

Kranitski's forehead was flushed with blood, and the words were hissing on his lips when he cried:

## The Argonauts

“In view of such feelings of yours toward me, how am I to explain the service rendered just now?”

“As pay for service which you have rendered me, or my family. I pay, we are at quits, and part forever.”

“You are not the only power in this world!” cried Kranitski; “not your will alone can open or close the doors of this house to me.”

Darvid, so pale that even his thin lips did not seem to possess a drop of blood, took from a letter-case and showed Kranitski, between two fingers, a letter in a small elegant envelope, bearing the address of Pani Malvina Darvid. The dark flush vanished from Kranitski without a trace; he became very pale and rested his hand on the arm of the chair; his eyes opened widely. Silence lasted some seconds; between those two men with faces as pale as linen hung the terror of a discovered secret. Darvid, with a voice so stifled that it was barely audible, was the first to speak.

“How this letter came into my hands we need not explain! Simply by chance. Such chances are very common, and they have in them only this good, that at times they put an end to deceit and—villainy!”

Kranitski, still very pale except that red spots were coming out on his forehead, looked very old all at once; he advanced some steps and stood before Darvid, the round table alone was between them. With stifled voice, but fixing his black, flashing eyes boldly on Darvid’s face, he said:

“Deceit! villainy! those words are said easily! Do you not know that in early youth your wife was almost my betrothed?”

Darvid’s lips were covered with irony, and he said:

“You deserted her at command of your mother, when she sent you to this capital in search of the golden fleece.”

“And when you went to the ends of the earth for it,”

## The Argonauts

answered Kranitski, you thought proper to place me to guard the woman whom I loved formerly. You considered yourself invincible, even when separated by hundreds or thousands of miles from her——”

“Let us stop this ridiculous discussion,” said Darvid.

“As for me,” put in Kranitski, with animation, “I will finish it by offering you any satisfaction which you may demand. I await your seconds.”

Darvid laughed loudly and sharply.

“A duel! Do you think that the world would not know the cause of it? Your former betrothed would appear in the matter. For that I should care less, though I must care, for she bears my name, but I have daughters, and I have business——”

He was silent a while, then he finished:

“A scandal might injure my business, and most assuredly would injure the future of my daughters; therefore I will neither challenge you to a duel, nor will I direct my servants to thrash you!”

A trembling shook Kranitski from head to foot, as if from the effects of a blow; he straightened himself, he became manful, and crushing in his hand the bank check which he had received, hurled that paper bullet into Darvid's face so directly that it hit him at the top of his bronze-colored whiskers and fell to his feet. Then with elastic movement, and with a grace which was unconscious and uncommon, he turned toward the door and strode out. Darvid remained alone. In that spacious, lofty chamber, richly furnished, in the abundant light of a costly lamp, he remained alone. Clasping his inclined head with both hands, he squeezed it with his white, lean fingers, as with pincers. How many vexations and troubles had met him here after an absence of years! There was something greater

## The Argonauts

still than even these vexations and troubles. The coil of serpents rose in his breast and crawled up to his very throat. That was torture mixed with a feeling of unendurable disgust. But Darvid avoided high-sounding phrases, and would never think or say: torture, disgust. That was a manner of speaking for idlers and poets. He, a man of iron industry, knew only the words vexation, trouble. What is he to do now with that woman? Throw her out like a beast which, bathed in milk and honey by its owner, has bitten him to the blood? Impossible. His children, especially his daughters, his business, his position, his house—scandals are harmful in every way. So he must live on under the same roof with her; meet the sight of her face, her eyes—those eyes which on a time were for him—yes, it cannot be otherwise. He must endure that and master himself; master himself mightily, so as not to let things reach a scene, or reproaches, or explanation. Naturally, no scenes, disputes, or explanations. For, first of all, what can they profit? Nothing save a useless expense of energy, and he needs energy so much. Besides, the very best punishment for that woman is unbroken silence, which will raise between her and him an impenetrable wall. From words, even though they be as sharp as sword-edges, some sound may be got, some slight hope of salvation; but silence, concealing hidden knowledge of a deed, is a coffin in which, from the first hour of each day to the end of it, that woman's pride will be placed with all that in her may still be human. Contempt as silent as the grave! She will eat of his millions, seasoned with his contempt. She will array herself in his millions, interwoven with his hatred. Hatred? Oh, beyond doubt he hates her with passion, and only at times does her name move marvelously through his brain with such sounds as if they were the echo of things very dear, things lost forever and ir-



## The Argonauts

replaceable. Can it be? Is it possible that she did that? Malvina, once an ideal maiden, and ten years later a woman so loving that when he was going on a journey she threw herself on her knees and wept, and then besought him not to go from her! He remembers the scene perfectly. Her hair of pale gold, dropping then in disorder to her shoulders and bosom—her magnificent hair, surrounded by which the tears flowing down her face glistened like diamonds! He raised his head, straightened himself. What stupidity! On what sentiment and exaltation is he losing time and energy! He needs them for something else. He needs to concentrate all his forces to bring his new designs to the desired culmination. Why does “that hound” not show himself and bring the answer needed? Ah, if he could only get one hour of that conversation, he would convince; he would capture; he would overcome rivals, and seize into his own sole possession new fields of industry and speculation! There are hindrances, intrigues, dangerous rivalries, he knows of them, and these oppositions it is precisely which attract him most of all. Now especially, with those vexations and troubles, victory and the new work would be as a spoonful of hashish to him, or a glass of strong, invigorating wine. He must go to the club. A game of cards, to which he devotes some night hours frequently, is not specially pleasant, but he plays with persons of high position in society, or with those who are needed in his business. He will find perhaps, also, that man for whom he has been waiting, vainly, some days.

He was extending his hand to the button of the electric bell when from behind the portières which half hid the door opening to the interior of the mansion a thin and timid voice came; one could hardly tell whether it was the voice of a child or a young lady:

## The Argonauts

“Is it permitted to enter?”

Darvid went to the door hurriedly, saying, also hurriedly:

“It is! It is!”

At that moment, from the darkness which filled the adjoining room, into the abundant light of the study, came a maiden of fifteen years, in a bright dress; she was tall and very slender, with a small waist and narrow breast. An immense wealth of pale, golden hair seemed to bend back with its weight her small, shapely head somewhat; her oval face, with its delicate features, had the blush of spring on it; her lips were like cherries, and under the arches of her dark brows were large dark eyes. Right behind the bright dress of the girl came a small shaggy creature, a ball of ash-colored silk, a little dog.

“Cara!” cried Darvid, “well, you are here, little one! How often have I asked you to come always boldly. How do you feel to-day? You have not coughed much, I think? Have you taken your daily walk? With whom did you go? With Miss Mary, or Irene? Come, come, sit here in this armchair.”

He held her small hand in his and led her toward the table, which was surrounded with armchairs. In his movements there was something polished and exquisite, as it were delicacy toward a person who was very dear and not much known, pushed to the degree where it might be called gallantry. Joined with this was a feeling of delight. She was pleased and smiling, but she was blushing and embarrassed. Advancing with short steps at his side, she bent to his hand every moment and kissed it. Her act was full of a timid charm, half capricious. They both looked like persons who were greatly pleased at meeting, but who remained on a footing of ceremony with each other. He received her in his study as a queen; he seated her in an arm-

## The Argonauts

chair, then, sitting very near, he held her hands in his. Between them, on the edge of his mistress's skirt, sat the dog with the ash-colored coat, in a posture of disquiet and uncertainty; it was evident that he was not accustomed to visit that room. Cara also, with an expression of timid happiness on her lips which were open, cast her glance with a smile on the vases and the walls, uncertain whether she was to speak, not knowing if she might say something; she bore herself very simply; her small hands rested without motion between her father's palms. At last she said, in a very low voice:

"I was so anxious to see you, father, dear; I wished so much to speak with you that I have come."

"You have done excellently, my little one. Why not come oftener? Your coming gives me great pleasure."

While speaking he looked all the time into her face, which was almost that of a little child. She was so like her mother, that Malvina's youth was simply renewed in Cara. But Malvina, when he made her acquaintance, was considerably older; the hair was just the same, very bright, and the eyes with dark brows and pupils, the same shape of forehead. With a deepening of the wrinkles between his brows he repeated:

"Why not come oftener?"

"You are always so occupied, father," whispered she.

"What of that?" answered he hurriedly and abruptly. "There is reproach in your voice. Are my occupations a crime? But labor is service, it is the value of a man. My children should esteem my labor more than others, since I toil for them as much, or even more, than for myself."

He did not even think of speaking to that child with a voice so abrupt, and with such a cloud on his forehead; but that cloud came to him from some place within, from a

## The Argonauts

distant feeling of something which he had never looked at directly before. But he hardly knew the girl! When he went away the last time she was a child; now she was almost full grown. But she, in the twinkling of an eye, slipped from the low armchair to the carpet, and kneeling with clasped hands began to speak passionately and quickly:

“Your child is on her knees before you, father. When you were far away she revered you, did you homage, longed for you; when you are here she loves you greatly, above everything——”

Here she turned and removed from her dress the ball of ash-colored silk, which was climbing to her shoulder.

“Go away, Puffie, go away! I have no time for thee now.”

She pushed away the little dog, which sat on the carpet some steps distant. Darvid felt a stream of pleasant warmth flooding into his breast from the words of his daughter; but on principle he did not like enthusiasm. In feelings and the expression of them he esteemed moderation beyond everything. He raised with both hands the girl's head, which was bending toward his knees.

“Be not excited, be not carried away. Repose is beautiful, it is indispensable; without repose no calculation can be accurate, no work complete. Your attachment makes me happy; but compose yourself, rise from your knees, sit comfortably.”

She put her hands together as in prayer.

“Let me stay as I am, father, at your knee. I imagined that on your return I should be able to talk often and long with you; to ask about everything, learn everything from you.”

She coughed. Darvid took her in his arms, and, without raising her from her knees, he drew her to his breast.

## The Argonauts

"See! your cough lasts! Do you cough much? Well, do not speak, do not speak! let it pass. Does this cough pass quickly?"

It had passed. She stopped coughing, laughed. Her teeth glittered like pearls between her red lips. A gleam of delight shot through Darvid's eyes.

"It has gone already! I do not cough often, only rarely. I am perfectly well. I was very sick when I got chilled at an open window while you were away, father."

"I know, I know. Your enthusiastic little head thought of opening the window on a winter night, so as to peep out and see how the garden looked covered with snow in the moonlight."

"The trees, father, the trees!" began she, smiling and with vivacity; "not the whole garden, just the trees, which, covered with snow and frost in the moonlight, were like pillars of marble, alabaster, crystal, set with diamonds, hung with laces; and whenever the slightest breeze moved, a rain of pearls was scattered on the ground."

"Great God!" exclaimed Darvid, "marbles, alabasters, laces, diamonds, pearls! But there was nothing of all this in fact! There was nothing but dry trunks, branches, snow, and hoar-frost. That is exaltation! And you see how destructive it may be! It brought you acute inflammation of the lungs, the traces of which are not gone yet."

"They are!" answered she, in passing, and then she spoke seriously. "My father, is it exaltation to worship something which is very beautiful, or to love some one greatly with all our strength? If it is—then I am given to exaltation, but without exaltation what could we live for?"

An expression of wonder, meditation, thoughtfulness filled her eyes and covered her finely cut face with a fresh-

## The Argonauts

ness like that of a wild rose. With a movement of wonder she opened her arms, and repeated:

“What do we live for?”

Darvid laughed.

“I see that your head is turned a little, but you are a child yet, and your trouble will pass.”

Stroking her pale, golden hair, he continued:

“Homage, love, and like things of the sensational sort, are very nice, very beautiful, but should not occupy the first place.”

Cara listened so eagerly that her mouth was open somewhat, and she became motionless as a statue.

“But what should stand in the first place, father?”

Darvid did not answer at once. What? What should stand in the first place?

“Duty,” said he.

“What duty, father?”

Again he was silent a while. What duty? Yes, what kind of duty?

“Naturally the duty of labor, hard labor.”

The flush on Cara’s face increased; she was all curiosity, all eagerness to hear her father’s words.

“Labor, for what, father, dear?”

“How? for what?”

“For what purpose? For what purpose? because no one labors for the labor itself. For what purpose?”

For what purpose? How that child pushed him to the wall with her questions! With hesitation in his voice, he answered:

“There are various purposes——”

“But you, father, for what are you working?” continued she, with eager curiosity.

He knew very well for what purpose he wished now to

## The Argonauts

undertake the gigantic labor of erecting a multitude of buildings for the residence of an army, but could he explain that to this child? Meanwhile the dark eyes of the child were fastened on his face, urging him to an answer.

"What is it?" said he. "I—labor gives me considerable, sometimes immense profits."

"In money?" asked she.

"In money."

She made a motion with her head, signifying that she knew that this long time.

"But I," began she, "if I wanted to work, should not know what to work for, I should not know for what object I could work."

He laughed.

"You will not need to work; I will work for you, and instead of you."

"Well, father!" exclaimed she, with a resonant laugh, "what can I do? To worship, to love, is exaltation—duty is labor, but if I may not labor, what am I to do?"

Again she opened her small hands with astonishment and inquiry; her eyes were flashing, her lips trembling.

Darvid, with marks of disagreeable feeling on his face, reached for his watch.

"I have no time," said he; "I must go to the club."

At that moment the servant announced from the ante-chamber, through the open door:

"Prince Zeno Skirgello."

Delight burst forth on Darvid's face. Cara sprang up from her knees, and looking around, called:

"Puff! Puff! Come, let us be off! doggy."

"Where is the prince?" asked Darvid, hurriedly. "Is he here, or in the carriage?"

"In the carriage," answered the servant.



## The Argonauts

“Beg him to come in, beg him to come in!”

In the delight which the unexpected arrival of the prince caused him at that time, he did not notice the expression of regret on Cara's face. Raising the little dog from the floor and holding him in her arms, she whispered:

“This is the third time, or the fourth—it is unknown which time it is!”

Darvid sprang toward her.

“You may remain! You know the prince——”

“Oh, no, father, I flee—I am not dressed!”

Her white robe with blue dots had the shape of a wrapper, and her hair was somewhat dishevelled. With the dog on her arm she ran to the door beyond which was darkness.

“Wait!” cried Darvid, and he took one of the candles which were burning on the desk in tall candlesticks. The prince was coming up the stairs slowly. “I will light you through the dark chambers.”

Saying this he walked with her to the second chamber, and when passing through that, she, while going at his side with the dog on her arm, and with her short step, which gave her tall form the charm of childhood, repeated:

“This is the fourth time, perhaps—it is unknown how many times it will be in this way!”

“What will be in this way?”

“Just when I begin to talk with you. Paf! something hinders!”

“What is to be done?” answered he, with a smile; “since your father is not a hermit, nor a small person on this world's chessboard.”

They went hurriedly, and passed through the second chamber. The flame of the candle which Darvid carried cast passing flashes on the gold and polish of the walls, and



## The Argonauts

the furniture. These were like tricky gnomes, appearing and vanishing in the silence, darkness, and emptiness.

Darvid thought:

“How dark it is here, and deserted!”

Cara divined this thought, as it were, and said:

“Mamma and Ira are invited to dine to-day at——”

She gave the name of one of the financial potentates, and added:

“After dinner they will come to dress for the theatre.”

“And thou?” inquired Darvid.

“I? I do not go into society yet, and so far the doctor forbids me to go to the theatre. I will read or talk with Miss Mary, and amuse myself with Puff.”

She stroked with her palm the silky head of the little dog. Darvid halted at the door of the third chamber, and gave Cara the light, from the weight of which her slight arm bent somewhat.

“Go on alone; I must hurry to the prince.”

She bent down to his hands, covered them with hurried, ardent kisses. With the flame of the candle before her rosy face, with the dog at her breast, and the pale, golden hair pushed back on her shoulders, she advanced in the darkness. Darvid returned through that darkness in the opposite direction, and when he had passed the two spacious chambers hastily, he felt in the twinkle of an eye as if from behind, from that interior, some weight had been placed on his shoulders. He looked around. There was nothing but vacancy, obscurity, and silence.

“Stupid! I must have the house lighted!” thought Darvid, and he hurried into the study, where, with movements a little too vivacious, with a fondling smile, and with repeated declarations that he felt happy, he greeted the prince, a man of middle age, of agreeable exterior, affable

## The Argonauts

and pleasant in speech. When they had sat down in arm-chairs, the prince declared the object of his visit, which was to invite Darvid to a hunt which was to take place soon on one of his estates. Darvid accepted the invitation with expressions of pleasure, a little too prompt and hearty. But he was never so well able to measure his words and movements in presence of those high-born people as in presence of others. He felt this himself, still he had not the power to refrain. In presence of them he found himself under the influence of one of his passions, and it carried him too far. The prince spoke of the sculptor, whose gifts he esteemed highly; the young man had gone directly from Darvid to him and told of all that he had heard, and what he had experienced.

"I was really affected by your kindness toward this youthful genius, and am delighted that he found in you a patron so magnanimous."

Darvid thought that in every case his arrows always struck the mark. To that act of his he was surely indebted for this unusual visit of the prince, and the invitation. With a smile, in which honey was overflowing, he said:

"That young man seems very ill. A visit to more favorable climates might save him. I must try that he does not reject the means which I shall offer him for that purpose. I foresee resistance, but I shall do what I can to overcome it, out of regard for art, and through good-will for a young man who, besides many sympathetic traits, has this on his side, that he rejoices in the exceptional favor of Prince Zeno."

Had he been able, Darvid would have kissed himself for that phrase, he felt so well satisfied with it; especially when the prince answered with animation:

"This, in the full sense of the words, means speaking and

## The Argonauts

acting beautifully! You use the gifts of fortune in a manner truly noble."

"Not fortune, prince, not fortune!" exclaimed Darvid, "but iron labor."

"Such toilers as you are the knights of the contemporary world," answered the prince, with vivacity; "the Du Guesclins and Cids of the present century."

He rose and, while pressing the hand of that Cid, fixed again in his memory the date of the hunt, which was not distant. Prince Zeno was an aristocrat of the purest blood, possessing a wide popularity which was fairly well deserved. Darvid was radiant. While accompanying the prince to the door of the antechamber he looked as if no coil of serpents had ever crawled up in his bosom, which was now beating with delight and with pride. The prince halted still a moment at the door, as if to recall something.

"Pardon me an indiscreet question, but this interests me immensely. Is there truth in the reports which are circulating in the city, that Baron Blauendorf is to have the honor in the near future of receiving the hand of your elder daughter?"

The expression of Darvid's face changed quickly, it became sharp and severe.

"Were there any truth in the report," answered he, "I should try to destroy it together with the report."

"And you would be right, perfectly right!" exclaimed the prince. Then he bent his lips almost to Darvid's ear and whispered:

"There is no Pactolus which such a young buck as Baron Emil would not drink up. He is a genuine devourer of fortunes. He has swallowed one already and the half of another."

He laughed and added at once, with immense affability:

## The Argonauts

"I see your son frequently—that worthy Kranitski presented him a year ago to us; I and my wife are very, very thankful. He is sympathetic, handsome, and a highly intellectual young man, who does you honor."

He went out. Darvid stood at the round table sunk in thought, with pins of irony in his smile and his eyes, with a cloud of wrinkles between his brows. That young sculptor, the favorite of Prince Zeno, with clothing almost in tatters, brought consumption on himself unhindered, till a parvenu appeared with his money-bag and rescued the pocket of the aristocrat, receiving in return a visit and an invitation to hunt. Behold the significance of money! Almost infinite power—ha! ha! ha!"

Internal laughter bore him away, and in his brain sounded the word: "Wretchedness! Wretchedness!"

What was it specially that he called wretchedness? He was not clearly conscious himself of this, but the feeling of it penetrated him. Again he heard the prince saying "that honest Kranitski," and a wave of blood rushed to his forehead. Everything that he had forgotten a moment earlier returned to his mind; the prince's voice roared in his ears: "That honest Kranitski." He repeated a number of times to himself, in a hissing whisper, "honest! honest!" And then he said:

"Wretchedness!"

That Baron Emil, the young buck capable of gulping down many a Pactolus! And he was to possess the hand of his daughter, with a considerable part of that fortune won by iron labor. Is Irene in love with him? But the baron is a vibrio and a monkey all in one. There is need to think over this family matter, lest a misfortune might happen. He cast a glance at the door behind which was darkness, thick,

## The Argonauts

silent, immovable. It resembled a window opened into a great and impenetrable secret.

"I must have the house lighted up," thought he. At this moment he heard the dull rumble of a carriage in the gateway as it entered. He pressed the button of the electric bell.

"Is that the lady who has come?"

"Yes, serene lord."

"Tell the coachman to wait. He will take me to the club."

When the servant opened the door the rustle of silk came in like the sound of wind. Two long silken robes passed over the floor of the anteroom and farther on in the darkness of the chambers, which was dispelled by the light of the lamp, borne by the servant advancing in front of them.

The glittering gnomes called forth by that light sprang along the gildings, polished walls, and furniture; ran out of the darkness, ran into it again; were lighted up and quenched on the inclined heads, drooping lids, and silent lips of the two women in rich array and gloomy.

## CHAPTER II

MALVINA DARVID was one of those women to whom old age is very tardy in coming, and whose beauty, modified in each season of life, never leaves them. For this last she was indebted less to the features of her face than to the immense charm of her movements, her smile, her expression, her speech. She retained yet the same pale, golden hair which she had years earlier, which she arranged high above her low forehead, calling to mind the statues of Grecian women. In contrast with that hair, and her slightly faded but delicate complexion, shone, from under dark brows, large eyes, also dark, with a very mild, warm expression, now bright, now tempered by a deep inevitable cloud of pensiveness. In a robe covered with lace, in the glitter of a star of diamonds in the bright aureole of her hair, she greeted the numerous acquaintances who entered her box at the theatre, with the affability and freedom of a perfect society lady. She was even celebrated in that great city for the qualities which constitute so-called society personages, and which, in those who knew her past, roused a certain wonder. It was known to all that that past was very modest. Darvid in his youth, which was far less brilliant than his present, married a poor orphan, a teacher. But Malvina Darvid was of those women who need only a golden setting to sparkle like diamonds. She shone in the great world with a charm, an elegance, a power of speech which were the same as if she had been its own daughter. She

## The Argonauts

was radiant with satisfaction, with serenity, often even with joyous animation, and only now and then did a slight wrinkle, with a barely discernible line furrowing her Grecian forehead, sink itself and cast on her face an expression of weariness, or the corners of her lips, still red and shapely, drop downward and make that oval, white, delicate face ten years older than it seemed to be usually. But those were only short and rare moments, after which Malvina Darvid was again entirely flooded with the brilliancy of her beautiful eyes, her splendid toilet, the sounds of her metallic voice, warm and full of sweetness. She seemed barely a few years older than her elder daughter. Sometimes guests left her box with the words:

“She is more beautiful than her daughter.”

And oftener still: “She is more charming and sympathetic than her daughter.”

Still nature had been no stepmother to Irene Darvid; but life, though so short thus far, had stamped on her exterior a mark which, while it astonished and discouraged, repelled.

If the younger sister seemed a living portrait of her mother, the elder recalled her father, with her high forehead, thin lips, and—a thing wonderful at such a tender age—the mark of irony drawn over them. Her hair, too, like her father’s, changed with fiery gleams of gold and bronze, while the pale complexion of her face, which was too long, was lighted by the frequent sharp glitter of her eyes, which, as those of her father, were not large, and had gray pupils with a cold glance, penetrating and reasoning. Her shapely form was somewhat too slender; her posture and movements too stiff and ceremonious. She passed in society for a haughty, cold, unapproachable, original, and even eccentric young lady.



## The Argonauts

On the stage was presented a play which had been preceded by immense praise; in the theatre had collected all that bore the name of high and fashionable society in the city. The boxes were filled, except one, which only just before the beginning of the second act was opened with a rattle and filled with loud, free, and bold conversation. It was occupied by a number of young men of elegant dress and manners; they, as it seemed, were connected by similarity in position, habits, and pleasures. From the higher to the lower rows of the theatre all eyes and glasses were turned toward that box, with its princes, young nabobs, sons of ancient families, or heirs to immense fortunes. Through boxes, armchairs, galleries, passed names notorious through deeds of originality, witty sayings, astonishing excesses; names interwoven with anecdotes about money and love-passages; the substance of the love-passages could be repeated only in whispers, while the amounts of money were mentioned with eyes widely opened in amazement. Two among these young men occupied public attention beyond others that winter: Baron Emil Blauendorf, and Maryan Darvid, both of families recently, but greatly, enriched. The Blauendorf house was older by some generations, and had become widely connected; on the other hand, their fortune in possession of the present descendant was vanishing quickly; in comparison with the entirely new edifice of the Darvids, it seemed a ruin. On these two general attention was concentrated with the greatest curiosity; for during that winter and the preceding one the most numerous anecdotes touching them were in circulation among those who frequented that theatre. They were so young, and still so noted! But Baron Emil was considerably older than Maryan; he was thirty and little favored in looks. Small, weakly, with red, closely-cut hair,



## The Argonauts

with features which were too small, and injured by a faded complexion, with small eyes, which, because of nearsightedness, were either covered with eyeglasses, or blinked at the light from behind yellow lids, which gave them an expression of pride and weariness. An unshapely exterior, unimposing, slight, bent, sickly. But through those small, yellowish, thin hands had passed already the fortune of the old baron, who was dead some years, and now a second fortune was passing through them—a fortune left scarcely a year before to her son by the baroness, who was famous for her idolatrous love of him. People looked, and wondered how such a great river of gold could flow through a creature so small and insignificant. With Maryan it was different. He astonished also, but he roused general sympathy. Such a child! And such a perfectly beautiful fellow at the same time! He was not twenty-three years of age yet; of fine stature; his manners were elegant and pleasing; he had the head of a cherub, with bright curling locks; a noble fresh face from which gazed eyes as blue as turquoise; and wise, too wise, perhaps, in so youthful a countenance, for these eyes seemed not to confide but to jeer, or to be wearied and seeking something through the world without finding it. Women whispered into one another's ears that that lad, when in England, had joined the Salvation Army; but after he had remained a short time in its ranks, he became, in Paris, a member of the Hashish Club, and brought away the habit of using narcotics to rouse dreams in himself and unusual conditions. If the city at that moment had temporary possession of Bianca Bianetti it was thanks to that lad, who, in a remote land, had won the heart of the singer. Some insisted that he had spent fabulous sums on her; others contradicted, declaring that not Bianca, the singer, had con-

## The Argonauts

sumed them, but Aurora, that noted Amazon of the circus, for whose favor princes of blood royal had striven in various capitals. That shapely little nabob had come, seen, and conquered; and when he had got his prize at an incredible outlay, he threw it aside and brought home Bianca. But is that all that may be told of him? He and Baron Emil are fountains of histories of this sort. The baron is considerably older, but this lad has a father. That father himself is a source of unbounded credit. Young Darvid has as many debts as there are golden curls on that cherub head of his. What will his papa say? What? Not long since that papa returned from the ends of the earth, after a long absence; will he put an end to the tricks of the boy? will he be able to do so? The white forehead of the youth has an expression of maturity, and at times of something else—namely, weariness—and in his blue eyes gleams of firmness, resolve, and contempt. He looks as if he despised the whole world then. He and the baron occupy themselves much with art and literature. They expend almost as much on art as on women and joyous suppers. They are highly cultured. The baron plays like an artist; Maryan translates poetry into various languages. In the box were a number of others resembling these two, but the others had places elsewhere in the theatre: they had come for a brief time and left the box afterward, then there remained only the baron and young Darvid. Behind their chairs sat some third man, very quietly, as if to attract the least attention possible. This was Pan Arthur Kranitski. People were accustomed to see him here and elsewhere with these two young men, and with others also, but with these two most frequently; his hair curled, freshened; his black mustache, pointed at the ends above his red lips, in the fashion of young men. But to-day he looks con-

## The Argonauts

siderably more retiring and older than usual. With much bold conversation, with laughter which cast his head back, with movements full of grace and animation, he generally strove to equal, and did equal, those two young nabobs, whose Mentor he seemed to be, and at the same time their comrade and continual guest, as well as their gracious protector. This time he was weighed down and gloomy, with spots on his aged forehead. He was sitting in a corner of the box, turning his attention neither to the play nor the audience; and, what was more, not striving to attract the attention of anyone. But from behind the shoulders of the young men in the front of the box, his hand, as if directed by an irresistible impulse, turned the opera-glass, from moment to moment, toward Malvina Darvid. He felt that he ought not to look so persistently at that woman with the gleaming star above her forehead, so he dropped his hand to raise it again and turn it in the same direction. As if imitating Kranitski, though really he did not even think of his existence, Baron Emil was acting in the same way with reference to Irene, gazing through his opera-glass at her face, which showed indifference and even weariness. He did this with a perfect disregard for the rest of the audience, and beginning at the second act, with an insolence which might have confused or angered another woman. But Irene, indifferent for some time, raised her glass also, and turned it on the baron. With these glasses the two people brought their faces near each other; they looked each other straight in the eyes, separated themselves from the audience, and gazed from the height of their two boxes in full disregard of everything happening around them. These two opera-glasses, planted in permanent opposition, attract the attention of all; but Irene and the baron do not heed that, do not care to know anything what-

## The Argonauts

ever about the audience, or the love scenes and tragedy represented in that theatre. They gaze long at each other with such indifference that one might ask, Why do they do that? Perhaps because it is original, perhaps to rouse the curiosity or the censure of the audience. But, after a long time, there appeared on their faces a jeering, self-willed smile, with a tinge of friendly comradeship, mixed in the baron's case with a passing gleam of the eyes; and in Irene's a pale flush, which covered her lofty forehead for a moment and then vanished. Dropping his hand with the opera-glass the baron turned to Maryan:

"*Très garçonnière ta sœur!*" said he. "She is bold and looks down on every thing; she is disenchanted. *Une désabusée!* Very interesting, and grows more and more so."

"Does she rouse a new shiver in you?" laughed Maryan.

"Yes, an entirely new shiver. That is a type of woman which is barely beginning. Twenty years old, and a perfectly distinct individuality! Twenty years old, and knows painted pots thoroughly!"

"That is a family trait with us," retorted Maryan.

"Your mother," continued the baron, "has undying beauty. Such splendid hair and eyes! But hers is another type entirely."

"A past one," put in Maryan.

"Yes, that is true, a past type, a simple one. But Panna Irene is new and intricate; yes, that is the word, intricate! We are all intricate now, full of contrasts, dissonances, and vexations."

In the theatre a thunder of applause was heard. The two young men looked at each other and laughed almost loudly.

"What are they playing?" asked the baron, indicating

## The Argonauts

the stage with his head. "*Ma foi!* I have not heard one word."

"Well old man," said Maryan, turning to Kranitski, "what are they doing on the stage?"

Kranitski dropped his hand with the opera-glass quickly and blurted out:

"What is the question, Maryan?"

His eyes, which were fine yet in their prolonged lids, were glazed with a tear.

"Ho, ho! romantic, there is a tear in your eye. The subject must be affecting! Let us listen!"

They began to listen, but quite differently from others. When passions exhibited on the stage quickened the beating of all hearts, or poetry, pulsating in lofty words, brightened faces with enthusiasm, Maryan and the baron laughed inattentively and with contempt; when stupidity, selfishness, or wit called out laughter, or ridicule, they were immovable in cold importance, puffed up and insolent; when the curtain came down at the end, and a deafening, prolonged thunder of applause was heard, their hands rested ostentatiously on the edge of the box. This opposition to the impressions and opinions of the audience might seem a childish wish for distinction; but one could feel besides in it, a bold throwing down of the gauntlet to common taste, and an estimate of the various elements and values in life directly in conflict with that of others.

Toward the end of the last act Kranitski entered Malvina Darvid's box, and saluting each woman silently he stood motionless. Malvina bowed toward him slightly, then a shadow came out on her face; this shadow seemed to have torn itself from an internal cloud. She frowned—a deep wrinkle appeared on her forehead, the corners of her mouth

## The Argonauts

drooped somewhat, and her face, with that brilliant star in the aureole of bright hair above, had an expression of pain when seen on the drapery of the box as a background.

But that did not last long. The box was filled with an assembly of brilliant and agreeable men, one of whom, with his gray hair and bearing of an official, made a low obeisance before the wife of Darvid, and seemed to lay at her feet smiles full of homage. Hence she grew affable, pleasant, vivacious, elegant in gestures, and in the modulation of her beautiful voice, she answered politeness with politeness, requests with promises, and gave opinions in return for questions touching the piece just played.

Baron Emil meanwhile approached Irene and, indicating the excited audience with his eyes, inquired:

“How do those shouting Arcadians please you?”

Taking on her shoulders the wrap which he held for her, she answered:

“They are happy!”

“Why?”

“Because they are naïve!”

“You have described the position famously!” cried he, with enthusiasm. “Only Arcadians could be so happy——”

“As to believe in those painted pots——”

“As their great-grandfathers did,” added he.

“Who knows,” said she, as it were, with deep thought, “whether the great-grandfathers really believed in them, or only——”

“Pretended belief! Ha! ha! ha! Beyond price! excellent! How you and I converse, do we not? This is harmony!”

“Not without dissonance.”

“Yes, yes, not without vexation. But that is nothing. That even rouses——”

## The Argonauts

During this interchange of opinions, which was like the glitter of cold and sharp steel, Kranitski, in the crowd which surrounded Malvina, was able to whisper to her:

“To-morrow at eleven.”

Without looking at him, and with a quiver of her brows, which drooped a little, she answered:

“It is too early.”

“Absolutely necessary. A catastrophe! A misfortune!” whispered he in addition.

She raised to him a glance which showed that she was tortured to her inmost soul by fear, but at the same moment Maryan gave her his arm, and said:

“To be original, to edify the Arcadians, and to give myself pleasure, I shall be to-day a virtuous son, conducting his own beautiful mamma downstairs!”

Adroit, with almost childish delight in his blue eyes, but with a sarcastic smile which seemed to have grown to his lips, which were shaded by a minute mustache, this youth led through the theatre corridor that woman not young, but whose beautiful and original head, and whose rich toilet drew all eyes to her.

“I am proud of you, dear mamma. To-day I have heard whole odes sung in your honor; even Emil declares that you are eclipsing Irene with your beauty.”

She was smiling and also angry. Her dark gleaming eyes rose with love to the shapely face of her son, but, striving to be dignified, she said:

“Maryan, you know that I am displeased at hearing you talk to me in such a tone.”

He laughed loudly.

“Then, my dear mamma, you should grow old as quickly as possible, put on a cap, and sit in a jacket at the fireplace. I should be filled then with timid respect,



## The Argonauts

and would hurry away with all speed from such an annoying mamma!"

"But since I am not annoying you will be good and come home with us. We shall drink tea together."

"*Au désespoir, chère maman!* But that cannot be. The rest of this day, or night, I have promised to friends."

"Is to-day the only time promised?" asked she, with a shade of sadness.

"For the true sage to-morrow and yesterday have no existence," answered Maryan.

They were at the open door of the carriage; Maryan bent and kissed his mother's hand.

"Be not angry, mamma dear! But you are never angry. If there is anything on earth that I worship yet it is your marvellous sweetness of temper."

"It is excessive," answered Malvina. "If I only knew how to dominate——"

He interrupted her, with a laugh:

"I should avoid you in that case; but now, all relations between us are excellent, though they are constitutional or even republican."

"I go for anarchy!" put in Baron Emil, helping Irene to a seat in the carriage.

He spoke somewhat through his nose and teeth, it was difficult to say whether by nature or habit, but that gave to his speech a character of contemptuousness and indolence.

"But of dissonances to-morrow *n'est ce pas?*" asked he.

"And of vexations!" concluded Irene with a smile, wherewith her hand remained on the baron's palm a few seconds longer than was necessary.

Soon after, Malvina Darvid was sitting at a small table covered with a tea service, in a study which was like the lined and gilded interior of a costly confectionery box.



## The Argonauts

Massive silver artistically finished, expensive porcelain, exquisite tid-bits, enticing the eye by their ornamentation, and the taste by the odor from them, tempered, however, by the strong fragrance of hyacinths, syringa, and violets which were blooming at the window and the walls, and on large and small tables everywhere.

The dress worn at the theatre was replaced now by a wrapper, composed of lace and material soft as down. Her posture in the low and deep armchair, the very manner even in which she arranged the folds of her robe seemed to exhale the luxury of rest; but her mind was at work, and filled her eyes with an expression of disquiet.

“‘Catastrophe! Misfortune!’ What could that be?” Marks of pain had begun to wind around her mouth; her hands were firmly clasped on her knees. “It may be that lost letter? A man must have a head filled with exaltation, and a character as weak as Kranitski’s to write such a letter. It may be—it is even sure to be so, for during a number of days she has felt in the air a catastrophe. But if?—Well! Is that a misfortune? Oh, rather the opposite?” The supposition that the dark, grievous truth of her life might be discovered by him who would seek vengeance because of it roused no fear in her; it caused her to hope for a thing disagreeable and yet desired. Let that horrid knot in which her life was involved be untied or torn apart sometime, in any way whatever. Alone she would never have strength to untie or to cut it, she is such an eternally weak, weak, weak creature! And still anything would be better than the present condition.

Two glittering tears rolled slowly down her cheeks; above the drooping eyelids a deep wrinkle cut a dark line across her forehead. The diamond star flashing rainbow gleams

## The Argonauts

from her hair, and the flowers, which dotted the room thickly with their pale colors, gave a background of wealth to that woman's life tragedy.

With a teacup in her hand Irene stood in the opposite door and looked at her mother uneasily, keenly, with such attention that her eyelids blinked repeatedly. Far from her now were those dry and sneering smiles in conversation with the baron. But she passed through the room calmly and sat in front of her mother.

"It seems that the play of to-night did not amuse you much, mamma."

She looked into the teacup so steadily that she could not see her mother's tears or expression of face. But that face grew bright on a sudden and was covered with an unrestrained smile.

"Is Cara sleeping?" inquired she.

"Of course; her room is quite silent, and so is Miss Mary's. Why do you not drink tea, mamma?"

Malvina raised the spoon slowly to her lips, and Irene began to speak calmly:

"I heard very unexpected news to-day. It seems that father has told Prince Zeno, who inquired about the matter, that he will not consent to my marriage with Baron Blauen-dorf."

"Why call that news unexpected?" asked Malvina, looking at her daughter.

Irene shrugged her shoulders slowly.

"I did not suppose that father would devote his precious time to things so trivial. This is unexpected and may bring trouble."

"What trouble?" inquired Malvina, with alarm.

"Father's opinions and mine may be in opposition."

"In that case your opinion will yield."

## The Argonauts

"I doubt that. I have my plans, my needs, my tastes; of these father can know nothing."

They were silent rather long; during this time Malvina raised her eyes to her daughter repeatedly, with the intent to say something, but she was unable, or at least she hesitated. At last she inquired in irresolute, almost timid, tones:

"Irene, do you love him?"

"Do I love the baron?"

These words coming from the lips of the young girl expressed immense astonishment.

"If Baron Emil should hear that question he would be the first to call it Arcadian or great-grandfatherly." And she laughed. "That is one of those things which do not exist, or which, at least, are changeable, temporary, dependent on the state of the nerves and the imagination. I have a cool imagination and calm nerves. I can do without painted pots."

As these words came slowly and coldly from the lips of her daughter, Malvina straightened herself, and her face was covered with a faint blush. She had preserved the rare, and at her age even wonderful, faculty of blushing.

"Ira!" cried she, "I hear these opinions not for the first time, and they give me such pain!"

She clasped her hands.

"Love, sympathy, when a choice is made——"

The voice broke in her throat all at once. Her eyelids drooped; her shoulders fell back on the chair; she was silent.

Irene laughed and made a gesture of despair with her hands.

"What can I do with the situation?" began she in a jesting tone. "It was not I who made this world, and I cannot reconstruct it. I might like to do so, perhaps, but

## The Argonauts

I cannot." Then she grew serious, and continued: "Love and sympathy may be very charming. I admit even that most assuredly they are when they exist; but usually if they exist it is for a short period, they flash up and quench—a few years, a few days, most frequently only days, and they pass—they are as if they had never been. Why illusions, when after them disenchantment must come? They merely cause useless exertion in life, disappointment, and suffering."

Irene's words and sententious, hard tones were in marvellous contrast with the maiden-roundness of her arms, which were bare in the broad sleeves of her dressing-gown, with the fresh red of her delicate lips, and the gleam of her blue eyes.

"Besides," added she, "I feel a sympathy for the baron; a certain kind of sympathy."

Malvina, after a moment's silence, asked in a low voice:

"What kind of sympathy is it?"

After a little hesitation Irene answered with a harsh, abrupt laugh:

"What kind of sympathy? A kind very common, it seems known universally. Sometimes his way of looking at me, or his pressure of the hand, moves me. But he pleases me most by his sincerity; he makes no pretence. He has never told me, like those three or four other suitors of mine, that he loves me. He has for me, as I have for him, a certain kind of sympathy; he considers me financially an excellent match, and for these two reasons he wishes to share with me his title of baron, and his relationship with certain families of counts and princes. And as I, on my part, need independence at the earliest, and my own house, so one thing for another, the exchange of services and interests is accomplished. We

## The Argonauts

do not hide from each other these motives of ours, and this creates between us sincere and comradelike relations, quite agreeable, and leading to no tirades or elegies in which there is not one bit of truth, or to any exaltation or despair which has no title to the future. This is all."

"Ira!" whispered Malvina after a long silence.

"What, mamma?"

"If I could—if I had the right——" Both were silent.

"What, mamma?"

"If I could believe in spite of——"

The gilded and artistic clock ticked among the pinks and lilies: tick-tack, tick-tack.

"What is it, mamma?"

"A cake, Ira!"

As Irene took a cake from the silver basket with her trembling hand, she cried, with glad laughter:

"At last you will eat even a cake! You have changed immensely, mamma. I cannot call you now as I once did, a little glutton, since for some time past you eat so little that it is nearly nothing."

Malvina smiled fondly at the name which on a time her daughter had given her jestingly, and Irene continued in the same tone:

"Remember, mamma, how you and I, with one small assistant in Cara, ate whole baskets of cakes, or big, big boxes of confectionery. Now that is past. I notice this long time that you eat almost nothing, and that you dress richly only because you must do so. At times, were it possible, you would put on haircloth instead of rich silks, would you not? Have I guessed rightly?"

While a faint blush covered her forehead and cheeks again, Malvina answered:

"Rightly."

## The Argonauts

Irene grew thoughtful; without raising her eyes to her mother she inquired in a low voice:

“What is the cause of this?”

“Returning currents of life are the cause,” answered Malvina after a rather long silence, and she continued, thoughtfully: “You see, my child, currents of a river when once they have passed never come back again, but currents of life come back. My early youth was poor, as you know, calm, laborious, brightened by ideals, from which I have deviated much! That was long ago, but it happened. In life so many years pass sometimes, that events which precede those years seem a dream, but they are real and come back to us.”

Irene listened to this hesitating, low conversation with drooping eyelids and forehead resting on her hand. She made no answer. Malvina, sunk in thought, was silent also.

A few minutes later the tea things vanished from the table, removed without a sound almost, and borne out by the young waiting-maid.

With eyelids still drooping, as if she were finishing an idea circling stubbornly in her head, Irene said with pensive lips:

“A haircloth!” She rose then, and, suppressing a yawn, said: “I am sleepy. Good-night, mamma, dear!” She placed a brief kiss on her mother’s hand: “Shall I call Rosalia?”

“No, no! Tell her to go to sleep. I will undress myself and go to bed unattended.”

“Good-night!”

Stepping quietly along the carpet Irene passed out. Malvina followed the young lady to the door with her eyes, and the moment she was alone she threw her arm over her head, turned her face upward, and repeated a number of

## The Argonauts

times, audibly: "O God! O God!" Then she rested her elbows on the arms of the chair, covered her face with both palms, the broad sleeves of her dress fell from her arms like broken wings. Thus, altogether motionless, she dropped into an abyss of regrets, reminiscences, and fears.

The night flowed on. The clock among the flowers in that study struck the first hour after midnight, then the second hour, and each time in the darkness of the drawing-rooms another clock answered in tones which were deeper and more resonant. The syringa and hyacinths gave out a still stronger odor, though the cold increased in that chamber. The frosty winter night was creeping in, even to dwellings which were carefully heated, and was filling them with darkness penetrated with cold; along Malvina's shoulders, which were bent over the arm of the chair, shivers began to pass.

In the darkness and cold a slight rustle was heard, and on the background of this darkness, in the doorway, appeared Irene. She wore a short, embroidered dress of cambric, and her fiery tresses were on her shoulders. She stood in the doorway with neck extended toward her mother, then walking in soft slippers silently she passed through the room like a shadow, and vanished beyond the opposite door. There was something ghostlike in those two women; one passed, without the slightest rustle, by the other, who was sleeping in a low chair, without making the least movement. Outside that mansion the streets of the city were entering into a deeper and longer silence.

The clock in the study struck three, in the darkness three strokes, remote and deep, answered. In the air the volatile and languid odor of syringas was overcome by the narcotic and stronger odor of hyacinths. The increasing cold flowed around them with painful contrast. In the door,



## The Argonauts

beyond which she had vanished, Irene appeared again, just as silently as before. She passed through the room and placed a shawl upon her mother's shoulders. Malvina, feeling the soft stuff, woke as if from a dream.

"What is this?" exclaimed she, raising her face, the cheeks of which were gleaming in the light of the lamp; but when she saw her daughter she smiled with relief immediately.

"That is you, Ira? Why are you not asleep?"

"I cannot sleep, and I came for the book which we began to read together. It is growing cold, so I brought a shawl. Good-night."

She went aside but did not leave the room. She had no book in her hand; perhaps she was looking for it in the beautifully carved case filled with books, for she opened the case and stood before it with arms raised toward the upper shelves, her hair lying motionless on the white cambric covering her shoulders.

Malvina was looking at her daughter, in her eyes was impatience; she was waiting for her to go.

"Is it late?" asked she.

"Very late," answered Irene, without turning her head.

"Does Cara cough to-night?"

"I have not heard her cough to-day."

Malvina rose, but tottered so much that she was forced to rest her hand on the edge of the table. She seemed greatly wearied.

"Go to sleep. Good-night!" said she, passing her daughter.

Irene looked at her tottering step and followed her quickly a number of paces.

"Mamma!" cried she.

"What, Ira?"



## The Argonauts

Irene stood before her mother a moment, her lips were quivering with words which she withheld, till she bent, kissed her mother's hand gently, and said in her usual manner:

“Good-night!”

Then she stood a while longer before the open case, listening to the rustle made by her mother while going to bed, and when that had ceased she closed the case and moved quietly into the darkness behind the outer door.

At that same time a carriage thundered in the silence and passed through the gateway. Restrained movement rose in the antechamber from which one servant ran out into the dimly lighted stairway, and another rushed to the study and bedroom of the master of the mansion to increase quickly the light of the lamps there. Darvid went up the stairs quickly and with sprightliness; he threw into the hands of the servant his fur, which was costly and original, since it was brought from the distant North, and began at once to read at the round table, through an eyeglass, that which he had jotted down recently in his pocket notebook. The book was in ivory binding with a gold monogram, and a pencil with a gold case. While reading Darvid put a brief question to the servant:

“Has Pan Maryan returned?”

The answer was negative. Large and heavy wrinkles appeared between Darvid's brows, but he continued to read his notes. Almost a quarter of an hour later he wrote something more while bending over the desk, and standing. Soon in the bedchamber, furnished by the most skillful decorator of the capital, a night-lamp on the mantel of a chimney illuminated a bed adorned with rich carving; a white and lean hand stretched out on a silk coverlet, and a face also, which was like ivory, and shining with two blue sleepless

## The Argonauts

eyes, keenly glittering. Darvid cast an inattentive glance through the room, over which, in the pale lamplight, two beautiful female heads seemed to hover, reflected and multiplied in mirrors standing opposite each other. This was a most beautiful work—a genuine Greuze. To win this masterpiece Darvid outbid a number of men of high standing; he triumphed and was delighted. But now his sleepless glance passed over that pearl of art inattentively. His night at the club instead of diverting and calming had bored and irritated. His honorable partner was annoying, and rude in addition. Never would he have forced himself to play with the man, had not that relation been an honor, and—what was more—had it not been needful. Women say: one must suffer to be beautiful; men need to change only the last word and say: one must suffer to be powerful. But that was beginning to be repulsive, and, above all, to be wearisome. Only when in bed did he feel that he was weary. He could not sleep. He had slept badly for some weeks—since the time of that wretched letter. At thought of that letter the serpents stirred in Darvid's breast, but he shut them down in their den by hissing: "Stupidity!" And he fell into long and uneasy thought about that man whom he had sent on weighty business, but who had not returned yet.

Perhaps chance will not favor him this time, and another hand will seize the field of action and the great profits. He knows that he has enemies and rivals who envy, who undermine him. Well, he will win also in this case, only he would like something afterward—what? He himself does not know what—perhaps rest. To go for a time to Switzerland or Italy. For what purpose? He is not over curious about art and nature, he has no time to fall in love with them. Without occupation he would be bored in

## The Argonauts

all places, and besides he must finish these family questions. He must tame Maryan, and hinder Irene's marriage to the baron. He is fighting a battle with his own son and daughter. Cara is the only one with whom he has no trouble. She is mild and beautiful. Her head is turned also, but in another, a more agreeable direction. She is greatly attached to him, the dear child! She is frail. He must speak to the doctor about her. Perhaps send her to Italy. With whom? With her mother? He would never permit that. The child is his. He will go himself with Cara. But in that case what will become of his enterprise?

In the interior of the mansion were heard deep, metallic sounds. The clock struck five.

In that same mansion, at the distant end of it, in a chamber lighted by a blue night-lamp, was heard a low, dry cough, and a frail, tall maiden, in night-clothing covered with lace, sat up in a blue and white bed.

"Miss Mary! Miss Mary!" cried she, with fear in her voice.

From the adjoining chamber came a voice of agreeable tone and somewhat drowsy:

"You are not asleep, Cara?"

"I have slept. The cough woke me, but that is well, for I had a dreadful dream. I dreamed that papa and mamma——"

She stopped suddenly, and, though no one was looking at her, she hid her delicate face in the blue coverlet. So only in a whisper did she tell the end of her dream:

"They were angry at each other—so awfully angry—Ira put her arms around mamma—Maryan went away hissing. I hung to papa, and cried so, and cried."

In fact her eyes were then filled with tears from the dream.

## The Argonauts

But she stretched in the bed, and, with her head on the pillows, thought, till she called again:

"Miss Mary! Are you sleeping?"

"No, dear; do you wish anything?"

Cara began in a loud voice:

"I wish immensely, immensely, Miss Mary, to go with you to England, to your father and mother. Oh, how I should like to be in that parsonage a while, where your sisters teach poor children and nurse the sick, and your mother makes tea at the grate for your father when he comes home after services. Oh, Mary, if you and I could go to that place! It is so pleasant there." In the blue light and in the silence her thin voice recalled the twittering of a lark.

"We will go there sometime, dear. Your parents will permit, and we will go. But sleep now."

"Very well, I will sleep. Good-night, Miss Mary—my dear, good Miss Mary."

She lay some minutes quietly thinking, till she sat up again in bed coughing. When the cough had passed, she called in a low voice:

"Miss Mary! Miss Mary!"

There was no answer.

"She is sleeping," whispered Cara, and after a while she looked around, and, in a lower voice, called:

"Puffie! Puffie!"

At this call the little dog sprang from a neighboring chair, and in the twinkle of an eye was on the bed.

Cara stroked the silken coat of the dog, and bending toward him whispered:

"Puffie! Puffie! dear, little dog! lie here, sleep for thyself!"

She put him on her breast almost at her chin; with her

## The Argonauts

hand on his coat, and with the whisper: "Puffie! good Puffie!" she fell asleep.

Then was heard the sound of a drozhky, coming quickly, with uproar in front of the house, and again there was an end to voices and movement. Two men ascended the stairway, one much older than the other, with a carefully brushed, but somewhat worn hat, in a fashionable but somewhat worn fur. He spoke in a low voice:

"Yes, yes! *c'est quelque chose d'inoui!* he commanded me to break off all relations with you, and to stop visiting his house."

"A thousand and one nights! Why is it? What is it for?" exclaimed the other.

Suddenly he stopped part way on the stairs, and asked with a half jeering, half pitying look at his companion:

"If he should find out?"

Kranitski turned his face away.

"My Maryan—with you—of that——"

"Painted pots!" laughed Maryan. "Do you take me for my great-grandfather? Well, has he found it out?"

With red spots on his cheeks and forehead Kranitski blinked affirmatively.

"*Sapristi!*" imprecated Maryan, and immediately he laughed again. "And why? for what reason? Did he also believe in painted pots? I thought him modern."

"Alas!" sighed Kranitski.

They advanced in silence, passed the first story of the house. Maryan's bachelor chambers were on the second story.

"My dear old man, I am sorry for you, enormously sorry," began young Darvid again. "I have grown so accustomed to you. You will have to suffer, and poor mamma, too.

## The Argonauts

Where did he get all this? A man of such sense! I thought that his head was better ventilated——”

He could not finish, for Kranitski threw himself on his neck at the very door of his apartments. He wept. Drying his eyes with his perfumed cambric handkerchief, he said:

“My Maryan, I shall not survive this blow! I love you all so much—you are—for me—as a younger brother——”

He tried to kiss him, but Maryan broke away from his embrace, and his tears, the moisture of which he felt on his face, with discomfort.

“But it is absurd!” exclaimed he. “Are we to break our relations because they displease someone? Are we slaves? Laugh at that, my dear. Come to me as before, but pass the night now with me, for it would be difficult for you to go home at this hour.”

He touched the button of the electric bell, and when the door opened at once, he said to his companion on the threshold:

“Bianca sings that aria from the ‘Cavalier’ gloriously, does she not? La, la, la——”

He tried to give the music, but his voice failed. So he disappeared behind the closing door, humming the aria of the splendid singer which he had just heard at supper.

Below, two clocks, one after the other, sounded out six. Through the great windows light began to enter from the snow-covered streets. That seemed the gradual and slow-drawing aside of a dark curtain, from behind which came out with increasing distinctness, furniture, pictures, mirrors, candlesticks, vases, rugs, plushes, velvets, polish, gilt, mosaics, ivory, porcelain. Until all standing forth in the full light of that winter morning began like a pearl shell to interchange various colors and lustres, and to drop from the walls and ceilings reflections of gold on the shining floor.

### CHAPTER III

KRANITSKI ascended a carpeted stairway, which was adorned with lamps and statues. His fur coat with a costly collar was over worn somewhat; his hat was shining; his step free, and there was a cheerful smile under his mustaches, which were turned up at the ends carefully. The stairway was almost a street. People were passing up and down on it, and whenever you met them and caught their eyes you noted freedom, self-confidence, elegance; you saw the eleventh commandment of God, which Moses, only through some inconceivable forgetfulness, neglected to add to the Decalogue.

Entering the antechamber he threw the servant his fur, from which issued the odor of excellent perfumes. From the pocket of his coat peeped the edge of a handkerchief. He arranged before a mirror his hair, thick yet above his forehead, but showing from behind a small, circular, bald spot. Hat in hand, and with a springy, self-confident tread, he entered the drawing-room. Only two red spots above his brow interrupted the whiteness of his forehead, which was slightly wrinkled; his eyes, usually gleaming or affable, were mist-covered.

In a door, opposite that by which Kranitski entered, stood Irene, under a crimson drapery of curtains, with an open book in her hand. Kranitski, with that light-swaying of the body, with which elegants are accustomed to approach ladies, approached Irene and, bending easily before her, kissed her hand.



## The Argonauts

"May one enter?" inquired he, indicating with his eyes the door of an adjoining chamber.

"I beg you to enter, mamma is in her study."

The inclination of head, and sound of Irene's voice, contained only that measure of cordiality which was absolutely demanded by politeness, but that was her way always and with every one. Cold radiated from her, and such indifference that it was sometimes a contemptuous disregard for people and things. But when Kranitski, hat in hand, passed two drawing-rooms she followed him with her glance, in which, besides disquiet, there was a kindly feeling, and more, perhaps, a feeling of pity. She was accustomed from childhood to see him; he was gentle, as ready as a slave to render service, as ready as a friend to oblige; he noted the wants not only of the lady of the house, but of each of her children. He had the subdued manner and pliancy of people who do not feel that they merit what they have, and are ever trembling lest they lose it. He had, besides, the gift of reading beautifully in various languages. For a number of years Irene could not remember pleasanter evenings than those which, free from society demands, she had passed in her mother's study when Kranitski was present. Sometimes Cara and her governess took part in these domestic gatherings; sometimes, also, though more and more rarely, they were enlivened by the presence of Maryan, who, in the intervals of reading, chaffed with his sister and mother, and argued with Kranitski about various tendencies in taste and literature. Most frequently, however, Cara was occupied with lessons, and Maryan by society, and only she and Malvina, with artistic work in hand, listened in silence and thoughtfully to that resonant, manly voice, which rendered masterpieces of thought and poetry with perfect appreciation



## The Argonauts

and feeling. During such evenings Irene was seized at moments by a dream of certain grand solitudes, pure, surrounded by cordial warmth, remote from the uproar of streets, the rustle of silks, the noise of vain words, whose emptiness and falsehood she had measured; but straightway she said to herself: "Painted pots, ideals! these have no existence!" and she made a gesture, as if driving from above her head a beautiful butterfly, feeling convinced that that butterfly was merely a phantom. To-day, from minute observation, the conjecture rose in her that something uncommon had happened, and that something more must happen, also; she was colder and more formal than ever, with a burning spark of fear in the depth of her blue, clear eyes. Her dress was of cloth, closely fitting, somewhat masculine in the cut of the waist, and on the top of her head was a Japanese knot of fiery hair, pierced by a pin with steel lustres. In her hand was an open book, and she walked along slowly through the two spacious drawing-rooms. She did not raise her eyes from the book, though she did not turn a page in it. At one door she turned immediately, at the other, which was closed, she stopped for a few seconds when she caught the sound of conversation, carried on beyond the door, in low voices, by two people. She did not wish to hear that conversation. Oh, she did not! How long ago was it since she had striven to be deaf as well as blind, and frequently so deaf that no glance of the eye, no movement of the face might betray that she had sight or hearing. But now, as often as a louder sound struck her ears from beyond the closed door she stood immovable, and her eyelids quivered like leaves stirred by wind. For a long time it had seemed to her that something terrible might happen in that house some day, something to which she would not be able to

## The Argonauts

remain deaf and blind. Might it not happen just that day? With slow, even step along the gleaming floor, between purple, azure, and various shades of white, which filled the drawing-rooms, she walked, in her closely-fitting dress, from one door to the other, her eyes fixed on the book, her manner colder, more formal than ever, her delicate motionless face, above which the long pin threw out metallic gleams. Suddenly an outburst of silver laughter was heard at another door. Till that moment two female voices had been heard, speaking English, beyond this door, now thrown open with a rattle. Golden strips of light, cast in by the winter sun, were lying on the purple and white of the drawing-room. Into this drawing-room rushed a strange pair; a maiden of fifteen, in a bright dress, golden-haired, rosy, and tall, bent low; she held by the forepaws a little ash-colored dog, and with him went waltzing around the furniture of the room, humming as she moved the fashionable: La, la, la! La, la, la! A pair of small feet, in elegant slippers, and a pair of shaggy, beast paws, whirled over the gleaming inlaid floor, around long chairs, tables, columns holding vases; swiftly, swiftly did she go till she met Irene at the door of the next drawing-room. Cara raised the little dog from the floor, straightened herself, her eyes met the strange glance of her sister. Irene blinked repeatedly, as if some disagreeable light had struck her eyes.

“Always so gladsome, Cara!”

“I?” cried the girl. “Oh, so! Puffie made me laugh—and—the sun shines so nicely. The day is beautiful, isn’t it, Ira? Have you noticed how diamond sparks glitter on the snow? The trees are all covered with frost. Let us go with Miss Mary for a walk. I will take Puffie, but I will cover him with that blanket which I finished embroidering yesterday. Is mamma well?”

## The Argonauts

“Why do you ask about mamma?”

“Because, when I gave her ‘good-morning,’ I thought that she was ill, she was so pale—pale. I asked her, but she said: ‘Oh, it is nothing, I am well.’ Still it seems to me——”

“Let nothing seem to you!” Irene interrupted her almost angrily. “The surmises of children like you have no sense in them most of the time. Where are you going?”

“To father.”

She pointed with her eyes to her mother’s rooms.

“Is that—that man there?”

It was not to be discovered why she spoke in lowered tones, but Irene’s voice sounded almost harsh when she inquired:

“What man?”

“Pan Kranitski.”

Now Cara’s red, small lips, in the twinkle of an eye, formed a crooked line in spite of her; then, bending toward her sister, she said, almost in a whisper:

“Tell me, Ira, but tell the truth. Do you like that man—Kranitski?”

Irene laughed aloud, freely, almost as she had never laughed.

“Ridiculous! Ah, what an amusing baby you are! Why should I not like him? He is our old and good acquaintance.” And returning to her usual formality, she added: “Besides, you know that I do not like anyone very much.”

“Not me?” asked Cara, fondly touching with her red lips the pale cheeks of her sister.

“You? A little! But go away. You hinder my reading.”

“I will go. Come Puffie—come!” And with the dog on her arm she went off, but she stopped at the door, and

## The Argonauts

turning to Irene, she bent forward a little, and said, in a low voice: "But I do not like him—I do not know why this is. First I liked him, but for some time I cannot endure him—I do not know myself why."

At the last words she turned away, capriciously, and went on.

"She does not know! does not know!" whispered Irene over her book. "That is why she dances with the dog. What happiness in Arcadian life!"

The little one, going on, began to hum again, but near the door of her father's study she grew silent and stopped. The sound of a number of men's voices in conversation reached her. She dropped her hand, and whispered:

"Father has visitors! What shall we do now, Puffie? How shall we go in there?"

After a moment's thought and hesitation she stepped in very quietly under the drapery of the portière, and in the twinkle of an eye was sitting on a small, low stool which stood behind a tall case of shelves filled with books, which, placed near the door, formed with two walls a narrow, triangular space. That was an excellent corner, a real asylum which she could reach unobserved, and which she had selected for herself earlier. The books on the shelves hid her perfectly, but left small cracks through which she could see everyone. Whenever there were guests with her father she entered directly from the door, with one silent little step she pushed in, waited longer than the guests, and when they were gone she could talk with her father.

At the round table, which was covered with books, maps, and pamphlets, in broad armchairs were sitting, hat in hand, men of various statures and ages. They had not come on business, but to make calls of longer or shorter duration. Some were giving place to others, who came un-

## The Argonauts

ceasingly, or rather flowed in as wave follows wave. Some went, others came. The pressing of hands, bows more or less profound, polite and choice phrases, conversation, interrupted and begun again, conversation touching important and serious questions of European politics, local questions of the higher order, and problems of society, especially financial and economic.

Darvid's voice, low but metallic, filled the study, it was heard by all with an attention almost religious; in general, Darvid seemed to rule over that ever-changing throng of men, by his word, by his gestures, by his eyes, with their cold and penetrating gleam, from behind the glasses of his binocle. He was radiant with a certain kind of power, which made him what he was, and the world yielded to the charm of this power, for it created wealth, that object of most universal and passionate desire. He himself felt all its might at that moment. When at the door of the study were heard, announced by the servant, names famous because they were ancient, others known for high office, or for the reputation which science and mental gifts confer, he experienced a feeling like that which a cat must feel when stroked along the back. He felt the hand of fate stroking him, and the delight caused by this became very pleasing. He was eloquent, he was gleaming with self-confidence, judgment, and ease of utterance. Not the least pride was to be observed in him, only the gleam of glory issuing from his smooth forehead, and the mysterious sensation of apotheosis, which pushed an invisible pedestal under the man, and made him seem loftier than he was in reality.

At a certain moment a number of men entered, they seemed almost sunk in humility, and at the same time filled with solemnity. That was a delegation from a well-known philanthropic society in the city; they had come to Darvid

## The Argonauts

with a request to take part in their work by a money contribution and by personal assistance. He began by the gift of a considerable sum, but refused personal assistance. He had not the time, he said, but even had he time, he was opposed in principle to all philanthropic activity. "Philanthropy gives a beautiful witness touching those who engage in it, but it cannot prevent the misfortunes which torture the race; nay, it strengthens them needlessly, and offers premiums to sloth and incompetence. Only exertion of all forces in untiring and iron labor can save mankind from the cancer of poverty which tortures it. Were there no help behind any man's shoulders, no hands would drop down unoccupied; each man would exercise his own strength, and misery would vanish from this earth of ours."

Among those present, a guarded and immensely polite opposition rose, however.

"The weak, the cripples, lonely old men and children?"

"Philanthropy," answered Darvid, "cannot stop the existence of these social castaways, it merely continues and establishes them."

"But they have hungry stomachs, sad souls and hearts—like our own."

"What is to be done," inquired Darvid, with outspread palms which indicated regret. "There must be victors and vanquished in the world, and the sooner the latter are swept from existence the better for them and for mankind."

A look of displeasure was evident on the faces of some, but they were silent, the oldest man rose, and smiling most agreeably, ended the argument:

"But if philanthropy had many patrons like you its activity would correct the injustice of fate very frequently."

## The Argonauts

"Let us not call fate unjust," retorted Darvid with a smile, "because it favors strength and crushes incompetence. On the contrary its action is beneficent, for it strengthens all that is worthy of life, and destroys that which is useless."

"It has been just to you, and in this case we all owe it gratitude," concluded the oldest man in the delegation, ending the dispute hurriedly. Holding, meanwhile, Darvid's hand in his two palms he shook it with a cordial pressure, and his gray head, and face, furrowed with wrinkles, were bent in a profound obeisance. For those whom his honest heart pitied he carried a gift so considerable that, in spite of words which were not to his mind, the homage and gratitude which he gave came from perfect sincerity.

At last Darvid's study was deserted, and on his lips was fixed a smile which resembled a pricking pin. Why had he poured out such a great handful of money for an object which to him was indifferent, the need of which he did not recognize? Why? Habit, relations, public opinion, expressed orally, and by the printed word. A comedy! Misery! He frowned, the wrinkles between his brows were growing, when he heard a slight rustle behind. He looked around, and exclaimed:

"Cara! How did you come in? Ah! you were sitting in the corner behind the books! Only a reed such as you are could squeeze in through that cranny! What is your wish, my little daughter?"

He smiled at his daughter, though his glance turned to the clock standing in the corner of the room. But Cara, with seriousness on her rosy face, stretched out to him the little dog, which had just wakened and was still sleepy.

"First of all, I beg father to stroke Puffie—Puffie is pretty, and he is good, stroke him just once, father."

Darvid drew his palm a number of times, absent-mindedly, over the back of the dog.



## The Argonauts

"I have stroked him. But now if you have nothing else to say——"

"I have no time!" added she, finishing her father's sentence. She laughed, and dropping Puff on the armchair, she caught her father in both her arms:

"I will not let you go!" cried she; "father must give me a quarter of an hour, ten minutes, eight minutes, five minutes, I will speak quickly, quickly. 'If I have nothing more to say.' I have piles of things to say! I was sitting in the corner looking and listening, and I don't understand, father, why so many men come to you. When one looks at it all from a corner, it is so funny! They come in and bow——"

Here she ran to the door and began with motions and gestures to enact that of which she was talking. Puff sprang after his mistress, and, stopping in the middle of the room, did not take his eyes from her.

"They come in, they bow, they press your hand, father, they sit down, they listen."

She sat on the chair in the posture of a man, and gave her delicate features an expression of profound attention. Puff fixed his eyes on her and began to bark.

"Or in this way." She changed her expression from attention to gaping. Next she sprang up from the chair. Puff sprang up, too, and caught the end of her skirt in his little teeth. "They rise, they bow again, they all say the same things: I have the honor! I shall have the honor! I wish to have the honor!"

She bowed man-fashion, knocking her heels together, and then pushing apart her little, slippered feet, and Puff tugged at the edge of her dress, sprang away, barked repeatedly, and seized her dress in his teeth again.

"Puffie, don't hinder me! Puffie, go away! Some go



## The Argonauts

out, others come. Again: 'I have the honor! I wish to have the honor!' Puffie, go away! They press your hand, father. Oh, I have tired myself!"

Her breath had become hurried from quick motions and rapid speaking, a bright flush covered her face, she coughed and coughed again, she seized her father's arms.

"Do not run away, father! I have much to tell you. I will talk quickly."

Darvid had been standing in the middle of the room, and following her quick movements with his eyes, at first with an indulgent, and then with a more gladsome smile. That child was beaming with exuberant life, with wit also, which had the power to penetrate things and people; a most delicate sensitiveness, which made her an instrument of many strings, and these never ceased quivering. She reminded him marvellously of Malvina in her youth. When she began to cough he caught her, and said:

"Do not hurry so; do not speak so much; talk less; sit down here."

"I have no time, father, to talk slowly—I cannot sit down—for you will run away that moment. I must hold you and hurry. I want you to tell me why so many men come to you, and why you go to their houses. Do you love them? Do they love you? Is it agreeable and pleasant for you in their company? What do they want? What comes of these visits, pleasantness or profit? And whose profit, theirs or yours? or the profit of someone else, perhaps? What is all this for? Do not these visits remind you of the theatre? Though I have never been in the theatre. Here, as in the theatre, every man plays some part, pretends, puts on a face, does he not? Why does he do so? Do you like this, father? I beg you to tell, but only tell me everything, everything; for father, I want you to be my

## The Argonauts

master, my light—you are so wise, so respected, so great!”

Enthusiasm put sparks into her dark eyeballs which were turned up to her father's face. Darvid stroked her pale, golden hair.

“My dear child,” said he, “my little one!” After a while he added: “Are you a wild girl from Australia or Africa to ask me such questions? You have seen visits from childhood. Have you not seen your mother receiving many visitors, also?”

“Yes, yes, father; but mamma amuses herself with them, and is taking Ira into society. But what are visits to you? Are you amusing yourself, also?”

“How amuse?” laughed Darvid, “they annoy me oftenest of all, though an odd time they give me pleasure.”

“What pleasure?”

“You do not understand this yet. Relations, position in the world, significance.”

“What do you want of significance, father; why do you wish for a high position in society? What profit does significance give? Does it give happiness? See, father, I know one little history—Miss Mary's father, an English clergyman, has a parish in a poor, far-away corner, where there are no people of significance, and no rich men, but there are many poor and ignorant people there; and he has significance only among those poor people—that is, he has no significance whatever, still he is so happy, and all those people are so happy. They love one another, and live together. It is so warm and bright in that pastor's house, there, among the old trees. Miss Mary came away from there to get a little money for her youngest sister, whom she loves dearly. She lives pleasantly here, but she yearns for her family, and has told me so much of them; and

## The Argonauts

some time, father, I will beg you to let me go with Miss Mary to England, to that poor country parish, and see that great, warm, bright happiness which exists in it."

Tears glittered like diamonds in her gleaming eyes, and Darvid, with his arm around her slender waist, stood silent, in deep meditation. That child, by her questions, had let his thoughts down, as if by a string, to the bottom of things, at which he had never looked before—he had had no time. He might tell her that high significance in the world tickles vanity, flatters pride, helps, frequently, to carry business to a profitable conclusion—that is to pecuniary profit. He might confess to himself, also, that that English clergyman, in his quiet parsonage, under his ancient trees, seemed to him a very happy man all at once in that moment. After a while, he said:

"It must be so. Happiness and unhappiness are one thing for poor people, and another for the rich."

He looked at the clock.

"But now——"

"Now, I have no time!" laughed Cara. "No, no, father, two minutes more, a minute more—I will ask about something else."

"You will ask more!" exclaimed he, with such a laugh as he had hardly ever given.

"Yes, yes—something even more important than the last. I am troubled about it—it pains me so——"

She changed from foot to foot, and embraced her father with all her strength, as if fearing that he might run away.

"Did father mean really to say that one should not uphold the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, the sad, nor comfort them; that it is only necessary to leave them so that they may die as soon as possible? When father said that I felt sick in some way. Mamma and Ira this long time sup-

## The Argonauts

port two old men, so gray and nice, whom Miss Mary and I visit often. Do mamma and Ira do badly? Should we let them die as soon as possible from hunger? Brrr! it is terrible! Does father think so really, or did he only say what he did to get rid of those gentlemen the more quickly? Father you are good, the best, a dear, golden father. Do you really believe what you said, or was it to get rid of those men? I beg you to answer me, I beg you!"

This time her eyes were fixed on his face, with a gleam which was almost feverish, and again he stood in silence, filled with astonishment. Why could his mouth not open to tell that girl his profoundest conviction?

With all the wrinkles between his brows, he said, without a smile:

"I said that to get rid of them; I wished to be rid of those gentlemen as quickly as possible."

The soles of Cara's feet struck the floor time after time with delight.

"Yes, yes! I was sure of that! My best, dearest father——"

Stroking her hair, he added:

"We must be kind. Be kind always. Keep the life in gray-haired, nice old men. You will never lack money for that."

She kissed his hands; suddenly her glance fell on her father's desk, and she cried:

"Puffie! Puffie! where have you climbed to? There you are, you have crawled on to the desk and done so much mischief!"

The ash-colored little dog was on the great desk of the celebrated financier, on the top of a huge pile of papers; he was sitting with his nose against a window pane, growling at crows that were flying past and cawing. In that study,

## The Argonauts

which was so dignified as to be almost solemn, Cara's laughter was heard in silver tones:

"Look, father, how angry he is! He is angry at the crows! Oh, how he sticks his little nose up when one of them flies past. Do you see, father?"

"I see, I see! Never has such a dignified assistant been in charge of my desk. Oh, you little one!"

He put his arm around her and pressed her to his bosom, briefly, but heartily. Through his head passed at that moment the recollection of something unimportant which he had seen on a time: a golden sunray, which, flashing from behind clouds, had torn them apart, and disclosed a strip of clear azure beyond. He saw this through a window of a railroad car, mechanically, as we see things to which we are indifferent. Now he remembered it.

"The carriage is ready!" called the servant from the anteroom.

"You are a little giddy-head," said Darvid, looking at the clock. "I should have left the house a quarter of an hour ago."

She ran to bring his hat, and gave it with a low bow. Stooping quickly she raised a glove which he had dropped.

"Don't forget to leave Puffie here to keep my papers in order!"

With this jest on his lips he went to the antechamber, but, while putting on his fur and descending the stairway, he thought of the auction, where he was to buy a house sold for debt—an excellent investment.

"Is Pan Maryan at home?" asked Darvid of the Swiss at the street door.

The Swiss learned from servants that the young master was sleeping yet.

"What a miserable method of life! I must put a curb

## The Argonauts

on this wild buck immediately. Well, lack of time, a chronic lack of time!”

“Quickly! as quickly as possible!” called he to the driver, while entering the carriage.

He had left the house too late, his daughter had broken in on him with her twittering and fondling—but she is a ray of sunlight!

Cara removed Puff from her father’s papers, and, putting him on her breast, almost under her chin, as usual, passed through the drawing-rooms hurriedly. She was late for her lessons with Miss Mary. In one of the drawing-rooms she passed Irene. The slow promenade of the tall and formal young lady, with an open book in her hand, continued yet. Cara, while passing, and without stopping, said, with evident gladness:

“But I talked long with father to-day, long.”

“You have done that trick!” answered Irene, indifferently.

Cara stopped as if fixed to the floor. In the careless voice of her sister she heard irony; she seemed ready for conflict; her brows contracted suddenly; her eyes were full of sparks. But Irene, absorbed in reading, was already a good number of steps away. After a few seconds, Cara vanished behind the door of her own room and Miss Mary’s.

Irene’s features, rather meagre and elongated, continued motionless; her paleness increased their formality. But as time passed, weariness settled the more deeply on her drooping eyelids. Whenever she passed a window of the drawing-rooms, the pin in her hair cast quick, sharp gleams in the sunlight.

At last the door of Malvina’s room opened and out came Kranitski, quite different from what he had been at his arrival. His shoulders were bent; his head drooping; on his

## The Argonauts

cheeks were red spots; his forehead was greatly wrinkled. He looked as though he had been weeping a moment before. Even his mustaches were hanging in woefulness over his carefully shaven chin. Irene stopped, and with the book in her two hands, which she had dropped, gazed at the man approaching her. He hastened his step, took her hand, and said in a low voice and hurriedly:

“I am the most wretched of beings! I was not worthy of such great happiness as—as—your mother’s friendship, so I lose it. *Je suis fini, complètement et cruellement fini.* I take farewell of you, Panna Irene—so many years! so many years! I loved you all so greatly, so heartily. Some people call me a romantic old dreamer. I am. I suffer. *Je souffre horriblement.* I wish you every happiness. Perhaps, we may never meet again. Perhaps, I shall go to the country. I take farewell of you. So many, so many years! *O Dieu!*”

His eyelids were red; he was bent more than ever as he passed out. On Irene’s face great alarm appeared.

“It is true, then. It is true!” whispered she. Springing forward like a bird she passed through the drawing-room, quickly and silently. Invisible wings bore her toward the closed door of her mother’s room; when entering, her manner was calm and distinguished, as usual, but her eyes, in which there was anxious concern, beheld the form of a woman lying in a deep armchair, her face covered with her hands. Malvina was weeping in silence; her sobs gave out no sound, they merely shook her shoulders at regular intervals. These shoulders were drooping forward, and it seemed as though an unseen weight were crushing them to the earth and would crush them down through it.

Irene hurried, silently; brought a vial from the adjoining bedchamber, poured some liquid on her palm, and touched her mother’s forehead and temples with it, delicately. Mal-



## The Argonauts

vina raised her face, which was deeply agitated by an expression of dread. At that instant one might have thought the woman feared her daughter. But Irene, in her usual calm voice, said:

“Insomnia always harms you, mamma. Again you have that horri<sup>c</sup> neuralgia!”

“Yes, I feel a little ill,” answered Malvina in a weak voice.

She rose, and tried to smile at Irene, but her pale lips merely quivered, and her eyelids drooped; they were swollen from weeping. With a step which she strove to make firm and steady she went toward her bedroom.

Irene followed some steps behind.

“Mamma?”

“What, my child?”

Irene’s lips opened and closed repeatedly; it seemed as though some cry would come from them, but she only said in low tones:

“A little wine or bouillon might be brought?”

Malvina shook her head, advanced some steps, looked around:

“Ira!”

The daughter stood before her mother, but now Malvina in her turn was speechless. She inclined her forehead, which covered slowly with a blush; at last she inquired in a low voice:

“Is your father at home?”

“I heard him drive away some moments ago.”

“On his return, should he wish to see me, say that I am waiting for him.”

“Very well, mamma.”

In the door she turned again:

“Should someone else come—I cannot——”



## The Argonauts

Irene halted a number of steps from her mother in the formal posture of a society young lady, and said:

"Be at rest, mamma; I shall not go a step away, and I shall not let anyone interrupt you. Not even father if you wish—perhaps to-morrow would be better?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Malvina, with sudden animation. "On the contrary, as soon as possible—beg your father to come, and let me know at the earliest."

"Very well, mamma."

Malvina closed the bedroom door, advanced a few steps, and fell on her knees at her richly covered bed. Amid furniture, finished in yellow damask, on a downy bed, covered with cambric and lace, she raised her clasped hands, and said, in whispers broken with sobs:

"O God! O God! O God!"

She was of those weak beings who to live need heart-felt love as much as air, and who are infected by this love without power of resisting it. To such a love had she yielded once in the chill and emptiness of rich drawing-rooms. That was a happening of long ago; she was the weaker at that time because she was caught by a breeze from the spring of her life, passed in the company of that man who was casting himself at her feet then. In that moment of yielding a pebble had dropped on her, the weight of which increased with the course of years and the growth of her children. She had not thought for an instant that she was the heroine of a drama. On the contrary, she repeated, with a face always blushing from shame: "Weak! weak! weak!" and, from a time rather remote, it was joined with another word, "Guilty." She was weak, still to-day she had found strength at last to cut one of those knots in which her life had been involved so repulsively. Oh, that the other might be torn apart quickly; then she

## The Argonauts

could go far from the world into lone obscurity, an abyss occupied only by her endless penitence. In her head a plan had matured. She wished to speak with Darvid as soon as possible, and she doubted not that in the near future he would agree with her. Her daughters? Well, was it not better that such a mother should leave them, vanish from their eyes?

Irene pushed to the window a small table, on which were painting materials; she took her place at the table, and with fixed attention in her eyes began to outline a cluster of beautiful flowers. They were chrysanthemums, and seemed to be opening their snowy and fiery petals to mystic kisses. Deep silence reigned in the mansion, and only after a certain time had passed did the sound of glasses and porcelain come from a remote apartment, and at the door of the study a servant appeared, announcing that lunch was served. Irene raised her head from her work:

“Tell Panna Caroline and Miss Mary that mamma and I will not come to the table.”

She added a command to bring two cups of bouillon and some rusks. A while later she stood with a cup in her hand at her mother's door.

“May I come in?”

She held her ear to the door; there was no answer. Her lids blinked anxiously; she repeated the question, adding:

“Mamma, I beg——”

“Come in, Ira!”

Covered with silken materials Malvina was like a glittering wave on the bed. Irene entered with the bouillon and the rusks, then slipped through the room quietly and let down the shades. A mild half-gloom filled the chamber.

“This is better. Light when one has the headache is hurtful.” She went to the bed. “You cannot sleep in

## The Argonauts

these tight boots, try as you like, and without some hours of sleep the neuralgia will not leave you."

Before these words were finished, her slender hands had changed the tight boots for roomy and soft ones. She bent down, and with a touch of her fingers unfastened a number of hooks at her mother's breast.

"Now, it will be well!" Irene dropped her arms on her dress and smiled a little. Despite her fashionable robe and fantastic hairdressing there was in her at that moment something of the sister of charity, she seemed painstaking and cautious.

"And now, mamma, be a little glutton," added she with a smile; "you will drink the bouillon and eat the rusk; I will go to paint my chrysanthemums."

She was at the door when she heard the call:

"Ira!"

"What, mamma?"

Two arms stretched toward her, and surrounded her neck; and lips, so feverish that they burnt, covered her forehead and face with kisses. Irene in return pressed her lips to her mother's forehead and hand, but for a few seconds only, then she withdrew from the embrace with a gentle movement, moved away somewhat, and said:

"Be not excited, for that may increase the neuralgia."

At the door she turned again:

"Should anything be needed, just whisper; you know what delicate hearing I have; I shall hear. I shall be painting in your study. Those chrysanthemums are beautiful, and I have a new idea about them which interests me greatly."

In the tempered winter light from the window, in that study full of gilding, artistic trifles, syringas, and hyacinths, Irene sat at the table with painting utensils, sunk

## The Argonauts

in thought and idle. From beneath her brows, which had each the outline of a delicate little flame, her fixed eyes turned toward the past. She had in mind a time when she was ten years old, and was fitting a new dress on her doll with immense interest. At first she did not turn attention to her parents' conversation in the next chamber, but afterward, when the dress was fitted to the doll as if melted around it, she raised her head, and through the open door began to look and listen. Her father, with a jesting smile, was sitting in an armchair; her mother, in a white gown, was standing before him, with such an expression in her eyes as if she were praying for salvation.

"Aloysius!" said she, "have we not enough? Is there nothing in the world except property and profits—this golden idol?"

"I beg you to consider that there is something else," interrupted he, with a slight hiss of irony; "this luxury which surrounds you and becomes you so well."

Then she seated herself opposite him, and, bending forward, spoke somewhat quickly, disconnectedly:

"Do we live with each other? We do not by any means. We only see each other. There is nothing in common between us. You are swallowed up by business, I by society. I have taken a fancy, it is true, for amusement, but in the depth of my heart I am often very gloomy. I feel lonely. My early life, as you know, was modest, poor, toilsome, and often it calls to me reproachfully. You do not know of this, for we have no time to exchange ideas. I am of those women who need to feel guardianship, to have near them an ear which might listen to their hearts, and a mind which would direct their conscience. I am weak. I am full of dread. I fear that in view of your frequent, almost continual absence, I shall not be able to rear the children prop-

## The Argonauts

erly. I only know how to love them, I would give my life for them, but I am weak. I beg you not to leave me and them so frequently; that is, almost continuously—rather let this luxury decrease—I shall be glad, even, for the decrease will bring us nearer together. I beg you!”

She seized his hands, and it seemed as though she kissed them; but it was certain that the pale, golden wave of her dishevelled hair fell on them. Irene, though she was only ten years old then, felt pity for her mother, and waited with intense curiosity for her father’s answer.

“What do you wish in particular?” asked he. “I listen, I listen, still I do not know exactly what the question is. Is it this, that I should stop work, which I love and which succeeds with me? You must be in a waking dream. Those are ideas from another society, mere childish fancies.”

Here Irene’s thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of Cara.

\* “Ira, is mamma sick, since she did not come to luncheon?”

“Mamma has neuralgia often; you know that well.”

Cara turned to the door of her mother’s bedroom, but Irene stopped her.

“Do not go; she may be sleeping.”

The girl approached her sister:

“It seems to me——” she whispered and stopped.

“What seems to you a second time?”

“That there is something going on in this house——”

Irene frowned.

“What an imagination you have! You are ever imagining something uncommon. Now all these uncommon things are painted pots, or illusions. Life rolls on always in a common, prosaic movement. Stop making painted pots, and go out to walk with Puff and Miss Mary.”

## The Argonauts

Cara listened attentively, but with an incredulous expression of eyes, which were fixed on her sister's face.

"Very well, I will go to walk, but what you have said is not true, Ira. It is not painted pots that mamma is suffering and sick, that father goes out to dine for a whole week, and does not come to her at all; even that—man, going out to-day, began to cry in the antechamber—I saw him by chance—he wanted to say something to me, but I ran away——"

Irene shrugged her shoulders.

"You will be a poetess, perhaps, you exaggerate everything so terribly. Mamma is not troubled, she only has neuralgia. Father does not dine with us because he has so many invitations, and Pan Kranitski struck his nose against something which you, in poetic imagination, took for crying. Men never cry, and sensible girls, instead of filling their heads with painted pots, go to walk while good weather lasts and the sun shines. The doctor tells you to walk every day, not in the evening, but about this hour."

"I am going, I am going! You drive me away!"

She went on a number of steps, and turned again toward her sister:

"Father is angry at Maryan—I see that very clearly. Everything in this house is, somehow, so strange."

She went out, but Irene clasped her hands, and for some seconds squeezed them with all her might, and thought:

"That child will soon look at life just as I have been looking at it for some time past. It is necessary to foresee, absolutely necessary!" She returned to her reminiscences. Her mother said to her father:

"Our fortune is now considerable."

"In that direction," answered her father, "it never can be too great, nor even sufficient."

## The Argonauts

Then, playing with her beautiful hair, he asked:

“But do you believe that I love you?”

After some hesitation she answered:

“No. I have lost that faith, I lost it some time ago.”

Later there were many other words, some of which Irene remembered:

“The very best guardianship in this world,” said her father, “is wealth. Whoso has that will never lack mind, even; since, in case of need, he can buy mind from other men.

“In the training of our children you will expend all that is requisite. You will rear for me our daughters to be grand ladies; will you not? Educate them so that when mature they may feel as much at home in the highest social circles as in their own father’s household. As to you, amuse yourself, make connections, dress, be brilliant. The more you elevate the name which you bear, by beauty, wit, knowledge of life, the more service will you render me in return for the services which I render you. Besides, if you have any difficulty with the house, with teachers, with social relations, you have that honest Kranitski, who will serve you with great good will. I am very much pleased with that acquaintance. Just such a man did I need. He has extensive and very good connections; he is perfectly well-bred, obliging, polite. Foreseeing that he might be very useful to us, I became familiar with him. It is true that he has borrowed money a number of times of me, but he has rendered a number of services. Pay in return for value, that is the best method.”

He walked up and down through the room repeatedly; on his forehead, in his look, in his movements, he had an expression of perfect confidence in himself, his rights, and his reason. Suddenly, turning toward the door of remoter rooms, he cried with delight:



## The Argonauts

“Speak of the wolf, and he is before you! I greet you, dear sir.”

With these words he extended his hand to the guest who was entering. This was Kranitski, at that time in his highest manly beauty; petted, and a favorite in the best social circles because of it, and for other reasons also.

He gave a hearty greeting of David, who met him with delight, and then he stood before Malvina in such a posture, and with such an expression on his face, as if he desired only one thing on earth, to be able to drop on his knees before her.

That conversation and scene remained fixed in Irene's memory. She drew from it formerly, extensive conclusions, then she ceased altogether to recall it; now she thought again of it, forgetting her painted chrysanthemums, which, on the blue satin, seemed to gaze at her, having as subtle and enigmatical a look as she herself had.

A servant at the door announced: “Baron Emil Blauendorf!”

“Not at ho—” began she at once; but, halting, instructed the servant to ask him to wait. At her mother's desk she wrote on a narrow card of Bristol-board, in English:

“Mamma is ill with neuralgia; I am nursing her, and cannot see you to-day. I regret this, for the talk about dissonances began to be interesting. Bring me the continuation of it to-morrow!”

She gave this card, in an envelope addressed to the baron, to a servant, and sat down again to her chrysanthemums, this time with a smile both malicious and gladsome. With his appearance in that house, though unseen by her, Baron Emil had lent form in her head to a certain whimsical idea. She knew that it was whimsical, but just for that reason it pleased her, and must also please the baron. She began quickly, almost with enthusiasm, to paint dark outlines of



## The Argonauts

imps among the flowers. She disposed them so that they seemed to separate the flowers and keep them apart from one another. Some imps were climbing up, others were slipping down; they peeped out from behind petals, climbed along stems, but all were malicious, distorted, capricious, and pushed the tops of the flowers apart in such fashion that they did not let the half-bending petals meet in kisses. Painting quickly, Irene laughed. She imagined Baron Emil saying at sight of this work: "*C'est du nouveau!* It is not a painted pot! it is an individual thought. There is a new quiver there. It bites."

The expressions "painted pots," "Arcadians," "it bites," "new quivers," "rheumatism of thought," and many more she had from him. And she was not the only one who borrowed. These expressions had spread in a rather large circle of people who despised everything existing, and were seeking everything which was new and astonishing. Baron Emil was cultured, had read much. He read frequently Nietzsche's "Zarathustra," and spoke of the coming "race," the superhumans. He spoke somewhat through his nose and through his teeth.

The superhuman is he who is able to will absolutely and unconditionally.

When Irene thought that perhaps she would soon become the baron's wife, and leave that house, her brows contracted and her jeering smile vanished. Oh, she would not let him escape her! She had an absolute condition to put before the baron; he would accept it most assuredly, through deference to the amount of her dower. Energy glittered in her blue eyes. She turned her face toward the door of her mother's room with so quick a movement that the metallic pin in her hair cast a gleam of sharp steel above her head.

"One must know how to will," whispered she.

## CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Kranitski entered his own lodgings, after passing the night with Maryan, and after the long conversation with Malvina, old widow Clemens looked at him from behind her great spectacles, and dropped her hands:

“Are you sick, or what? Arabian adventure! Ah, what a look you have! What has happened? Maybe those pains have come; you have had them a number of times already. Why not take off your fur? Wait! I will help you this minute. Oh, you will be sick in addition to everything else.”

She was a squatty woman, heavy, with a striped kerchief on her shoulders, and wearing a short skirt, from under which appeared flat feet in tattered overshoes. She was seventy years old, at least; her large, sallow face was much withered. Bordered by gray hair and a white cap that face was bright with the gleam of dark eyes, still fiery, and quickly glancing from under a wrinkled, high forehead. Her whole figure had in it something of the fields, something primitive, which seemed not to have the least relation to that little drawing-room and its owner. That room contained everything which is found usually in such apartments, therefore: a sofa, armchairs, a table, a mirror with a console, a low and broad ottoman with cushions in Oriental fashion, porcelain figures on the console, old-fashioned shelves with books in nice bindings, a few oil paintings, small but neat, on the walls, a number of photographs, tastefully grouped above the ottoman, a large album on the table

## The Argonauts

before the sofa. But all this was a collection brought together at various seasons, and injured by time. The covering of the cushions had faded, the gilding on the mirror-frame was worn here and there, the leather covering on the furniture was worn and showed through cracks the stuffing within, the album was torn, the porcelain base of the lamp was broken. At the first cast of the eye the little drawing-room seemed elegant, but after a while, through spots and rents mended carefully, want was observed creeping forth. This want was hidden chiefly by perfect and minute cleanliness, in which one could recognize active, careful hands, industrious, untiring sweeping out, rubbing out, sewing, mending—those were the lean, aged hands, with broad palms and short fingers, which were now helping Kranitski to remove his fur coat. Meanwhile, a scolding, harsh voice, with tenderness at the base of it, continued:

“Again a night passed away from home. Surely off there with cards, or with madams of some sort! Oi, an offense against God! And this time you come home sick. I see that you are sick, your whole face is covered with red spots, you are hardly able to stand on your feet. Arabian adventure!”

“Give me rest!” answered Kranitski in a complaining voice. “I am sick, the most wretched of men. Everything is past for me—I beg you to look to the door, so that no one may enter; I am suffering too much to let in impertinent people.”

There were tears in his eyes, and his appearance was wretched. No one was looking at him then, except his old servant, who was as faithful as a dog, so he let the fetters of artificial youth and elegance drop from him. His shoulders were bent, his cheeks pendant, above his brows were red spots and thick wrinkles. He vanished then beyond the

## The Argonauts

half-closed door of his bedroom, and widow Clemens went back to the work interrupted by his coming. In the middle of the drawing-room, on an open card-table, lay, spread out, a dressing gown of Turkish stuff. That gown, beautiful on a time, was then faded; moreover, its lining was torn. Widow Clemens while repairing that lining and patching it had been interrupted by Kranitski's return; and now, wearing great steel-rimmed glasses, and with a brass thimble on her middle finger, she sat down again. She examined a rent through which wadding peeped out on the world, cautiously. But in spite of her attention fixed on the work she whispered, or rather talked on in a low and monotonous mutter:

“ ‘Look to the door, let no one in!’ As if anyone ever comes here. Long ago, comrades and various protectors used to come; they came often at first, afterward very seldom; but now it is perhaps two years since even a dog has looked in here. He could not bear impertinent people. Oh, yes! they come here, many of them, princes, counts, various rich persons. Oh, yes! while he was a novelty and brilliant they amused themselves with him as they would with a shining button, but when the button was rubbed and dull they threw it into a corner. The relations, the friends, the companions! Arabian adventure! Oh, this society! ”

She was silent a while, put a piece of carefully fitted material on the rent, raised her hand a number of times with the long thread, and again muttered:

“ But is that society? It is sin, not society! Roll in sin, like the devil in pitch, and then scream that it burns! Oi, Oi! ”

Silence reigned in the room; only the clock, that unavoidable dweller in all houses, that comrade of all people, ticked monotonously on the shelf, beneath the mirror, among the porcelain figures. Widow Clemens, while sewing, industri-

## The Argonauts

ously, muttered on. Her unbroken loneliness, the store of thoughts put away in her old head, and the care in her heart had given her the habit of soliloquy.

"And it will be worse yet. He has debts beyond calculation. He will die on a litter of straw, or in a hospital. Oh, if his dead mother could see this! Arabian adventure! Unless Stefanek and I drag him out of this pit!"

She stopped sewing and raised her spectacles to her forehead, their glass eyes gleamed above her gray brows, and she fell into deep thought. She moved her lips from time to time, but did not mutter. By this movement of the lips, and by her wrinkles, it could be seen that she was forming some plan, that she was imagining. Just then Kranitski's voice was heard from the bedroom.

She sprang up with the liveliness of twenty years, and, with a loud clattering of old overshoes, ran to the door.

"Give me the dressing-gown, mother; I am not well; I will not go anywhere to-day."

"Here is the dressing-gown; but if the lining is torn?"

"Torn or not, give it here, and my slippers, too; for I am not well."

"Here they are! Not well? I have said not well! O beloved God, what will come of this?"

But, while helping him to put on the dressing-gown, she inquired, with incredulity:

"Is it true, or a joke, that you will not leave the house to-day?"

"A joke!" answered he in bitterness. "If you knew what a joke this is! I will not leave the house to-day, or to-morrow, or perhaps ever. I will lie here and grieve till I grieve to death. Oh, that it might be very soon!"

"Arabian adventure! Never has it been like this! It is easy to see that the pitch has burnt!" whispered widow Clemens to herself. But aloud she said:

## The Argonauts

“Before you grieve to death we must get you some dinner. I will run to the town for meat. I will lock the door outside, so that impertinent counts, and various barons should not burst in,” added she, ironically.

Kranitski, left alone, locked up in his lodgings, robed in his dressing-gown, once costly, now faded, its sleeves tattered at the wrists, lay on the long-chair in front of his collection of pipes, arranged on the wall cunningly. In the society in which he moved collecting was universal. They collected pictures, miniatures, engravings, autographs, porcelain, old books, old spoons, old stuffs. Kranitski collected pipes. Some he had bought, but the greater number, by far, he had received on anniversaries of his name's-day, in proof of friendly recollection, and as keepsakes after a journey. During years many were collected, about a hundred; among them some were valuable, some poor but original, some even ridiculous, some immense in size, some small, some bright colored, some almost black; they were arranged on shelves at the wall with taste, and effectively.

Besides these pipes there were in the bed-room other objects of value: a writing-desk of peculiar wood, a porcelain frame, with Cupids at the top, surrounding an oval mirror, at which were bottles, vials, toilet boxes, and a rather long cigarette-case of pure gold, which Kranitski kept with him at all times, and which, as he lay now in the long-chair, he turned in his fingers, mechanically. This cigarette-case was a precious memento. He had received it soon after his arrival in the city, twenty and some years before, from Countess Eugenia, his mother's aunt. From their first meeting the countess was simply wild about him. Society even insisted, notwithstanding her more than ripe years, that she was madly in love with that uncommonly beautiful and

## The Argonauts

blooming young man, who had been reared by his mother with immense care, and trained to appear successfully in that society to which she had been born. Kranitski's mother, through various causes, had become the victim of a *mésalliance*; she grieved out, and wept away secretly; her life, in a village corner, after marrying a noble who was perfectly honorable, but neither a man of the world, nor the owner of much property. She desired for her only son a better fate than she herself had had, and prepared him for it long beforehand. He spoke French with a Parisian accent, and English quite well; he was versed in the literatures of Western Europe; he was a famous dancer; he was obliging; he had an inborn instinct of kindness toward people; he was popular, sought after, petted; when the money with which his mother furnished him proved insufficient he obtained a small office, through the influence of wealthy relatives, which, besides increasing his revenue, gave him a certain independent aspect. He passed whole days in great and wealthy houses, where he read books, aloud, to old princesses and countesses, and for young princesses and countesses; he held skeins of silk on his opened hands. He carried out commissions and various small affairs; at balls he led dances; he amused himself; fell in love, was loved in return; he passed evenings and nights in clubs, and in private rooms at restaurants, at theatres, and behind the scenes in theatres, where he paid homage to famous actresses of various degrees and qualities. Those were times truly joyous and golden. At that period he was served not by widow Clemens, but by a man; he dined—if not with friends or relatives—at the best restaurants. At that time, too, he did something magnanimous, which brought reward in the form of great mental profit: He passed a whole year in Italy with Count Alfred, his relative, who



## The Argonauts

was suffering from consumption; Kranitski nursed, amused, and comforted his cousin with patience, attachment, and tenderness which were perfectly sincere, and which came from a heart inclined to warm, almost submissive feelings. In return that year gave him skill in the use of Italian, and a wide acquaintance with the achievements and the schools of art, of which he was an enthusiastic worshipper. Soon after he went with Prince Zeno to Paris, learned France and its capital well, and on his return remained for some time as a reader with the prince, whose eyes were affected. His power of beautiful reading in many languages brought him a wide reputation; he was distinguished in drawing-rooms by the ease of his speech and manners; to some he became a valued assistant in entertaining guests, and a pleasant companion in hours of loneliness; to others he was a master in the domain of amusements, and elegance in the arts of politeness and pleasure. At this period also he made the acquaintance of Darvid, and met his wife, whom he had known from childhood, and who had been his earliest ideal of womanhood. Thenceforth, his relations with other houses were relaxed considerably, for he gave himself to the Darvid house soul and body. Though Malvina's children had many tutors, he taught one of her daughters Italian, and the other English; he did this with devotion, with delight; and, therefore, that house became, as it were, his own, and was ever open to him. Moreover, during the last ten years great changes had happened in that society of which he was the adopted child, and so long the favorite.

Countess Eugenia had given her daughter in marriage to a French count, and resided in Paris; Count Alfred was dead; dead, also, was that dear, kindly Baroness Blauendorf,



## The Argonauts

from whom he had received as a gift that mirror with porcelain frame and Cupids. Others, too, were dead, or were living elsewhere. Only Prince Zeno remained, but he had cooled toward his former reader, notably because of the princess, who could not forgive Kranitski; since, as was too well known by all, he was occupied with the wife of that millionaire—the eternally absent.

There were still many acquaintances, and more recent relations, but these had neither the charm nor the certainty of those which time had in various ways broken, brought to an end, or relaxed.

His mother, the foundress of his destiny, had ceased to live some time before that.

*“Pauvre maman! pauvre maman!”*

How tenderly and unboundedly he had loved her. How long he had hesitated and fought with himself before he left at her persuasion, the house in which she had given birth to him. He regretted immensely the village, the freedom, and that bright-haired maiden in the neighborhood. But the wide world and the great city took on, in his mother’s narrative, the outlines of paradise, and his worthy relatives, the forms of demi-gods.

When at last, after long hesitation and struggles, he resolved to go away, how many were the kisses and embraces of his mother! how many were her maxims and advices; how many her predictions of happiness. He began to look at his own form in the mirrors, and to feel in his own person the movement of desires, hopes, ambitions. Once he caught himself bowing and making gestures, almost involuntarily, before the mirrors. He laughed aloud, his mother laughed also, for she had caught him in the act red-handed.

*“Pauvre maman! pauvre, chère maman!”*

## The Argonauts

And on the background of that domestic gladness, of those wonderful hopes, only one person by her conduct had raised a cloud on that heaven, beaming serenely. That was widow Clemens, an old servant of the house, and once his nurse, not young even at that time, and a childless widow.

She was morose, grumbling, peevish, but for a long time she said nothing; she did not hinder the thin, gray-haired mother, nor the youth, beautiful as a dream, from rejoicing and imagining; till at last she spoke when alone with the petted stripling. It was the end of an autumn day, twilight had begun to come down on the yard in Lipovka, and the linden grove, in a black line, cut through the evening ruddiness glowing in the western heavens. Widow Clemens, with her eyes fixed on the grove and the red of evening, said:

“Oi! Tulek, Tulek! how will this be? You will go away; you will take up and go away; but the sun will rise and set; the grove will rustle; the wheat will ripen; and the snow will fall when you are gone.”

He sat on the bench of the piazza, and said nothing. But in the distant fields, in the growing darkness, a shepherd's whistle gave out clear tones, simple, monotonous, they flew along the field like the weeping of space.

“Why go; do you know why—God alone knows. What are you throwing away? The beauties of God. What will you bring back? Perhaps the mud people cast at you.”

A cow bellowed in the stable; a belated working-woman muttered a song somewhere behind in the garden. The evening red was quenched; and above the roof the crescent of the moon came out, thin and like silver.

Widow Clemens whispered:

“Ill-fated! ill-fated boy!”

He was immensely far from considering himself ill-

## The Argonauts

fated, but something in his heart felt pain at leaving that village where he was born, at leaving Malvina, and it seemed to him that he ought to stay.

But he went. The Argonaut, of twenty and some years of age, went out into the world, slender, adroit, with eyes dark and fiery as youth, with cheeks shapely and fresh as peaches, with a forehead as white and pure as the petal of a lily; he went for a wife with a fortune, for the pleasures of the world—for the golden fleece.

Now he wrapped himself closely in the skirt of his faded dressing-gown, and let his head droop so low that the bald spot seemed white on the top of it; his lower lip dropped; the red spots came out over his dark brows on his wrinkled forehead. In his hand he held the cigarette-case presented by Countess Eugenia, now living in Paris, and at times he turned it in his fingers, with an unconscious movement, and that glittering object cast on the tattered sleeve of his dressing-gown, on his suffering face, on his long, thin fingers, its bright, golden reflection.

Meanwhile widow Clemens had returned to the kitchen, and there, not without a loud clattering of overshoes, had begun to cook the dinner. But Kranitski neither heard nor saw anything. From time to time the head, with its great cap, looked in through the kitchen door, gazed on him unquietly and pushed back to look in again soon.

“Will you have dinner now?” inquired she at last. “It is ready.”

In a low voice he asked for dinner, but he ate almost nothing; the woman had never yet seen him so broken, still she made no inquiry. When the moment came he would tell all himself. He was not of those who bear secrets to the grave with them. She waited on the man, gave him food, brought tea, cleared the table in silence. Once she

## The Argonauts

fell into trouble: Passing hurriedly through the room she lost one of the overshoes which she had on her feet:

"Ah! may thou be!—they fall off every moment!" grumbled she, and for some minutes she struggled with that overshoe, which, dropping from her foot, slipped along the floor noisily. Kranitski raised his head:

"What is that?" inquired he.

She made no answer, but when she was near the kitchen door, he cried:

"What have you on your feet that clatter so? It is irritating!"

She stopped at the door:

"What have I on my feet? Well, your old overshoes! Am I to wear out shoes every day, and then buy new ones? 'Irritating!' Arabian adventure! God grant that you never have worse irritation than overshoes clattering on the floor!"

And she grumbled on in the kitchen while going with an empty glass to the samovár:

"You wouldn't have a pinch of tea in the house if I went around in new shoes all my time!"

Darkness came down. Kranitski smoked cigarettes one after another, and was so sunk in thought that he trembled throughout his body. When widow Clemens brought in a lamp, with a milk-colored globe, which filled the room with a white, mild light, Kranitski looked at the head of the old woman in the white lamp-light, and, for the first time in a number of hours, he spoke:

"Come, mother, come nearer!" said he.

When she came he seized her rude fist in both his hands and shook it vigorously.

"What could I do; what would happen to me now, if you were not with me? No living soul of my own here! Alone, alone, as in a desert."

## The Argonauts

The onrush of tenderness burst through all obstructions. Confidences flowed on. He had loved for the last time in life, *le dernier amour*, and all had ended. She had forbidden him to see her. That decision of hers had been ripening for a long time. Reproaches of conscience, shame, despair as to her children. One daughter knew everything; the other might know it any day. She had let out of her hands the rudder of those hearts and consciences, for when she was talking with them her own fault closed her lips, like a red-hot seal. She thought herself the most pitiful of creatures. She did not wish to make further use of her husband's wealth, or the position which it gave her in society. She wished to go away, to settle down in some silent corner, vanish from the eyes of people.

Kranitski was so excited that he almost sobbed; here his speech was interrupted by a rough, sarcastic voice:

"It is well that she came to her senses at last——"

"What senses? What are you weaving, mother? You know nothing. Love is never an offense. *Ils ont péché, mais le ciel est un don.*"

"You are mad, Tulek! Am I some madam that you must speak French to me?"

Still he finished:

"*Ils ont souffert, c'est le sceau du pardon.* I will translate this for thee: They have sinned, but heaven is a gift—— They have suffered; suffering is the seal of pardon."

"Tulek, let heaven alone! To mix up such things with heaven—Arabian adventure!"

"Are you a priest, mother? I tell you of my own suffering and the suffering of that noble, sweet being——"

In the antechamber, the door of which widow Clemens, in returning from the city, had not locked, was heard stamping, and the youthful voice of a man called:

## The Argonauts

"Is your master at home?"

"Arabian adventure!" muttered widow Clemens.

"Maryan!" exclaimed Kranitski with delight, and he answered aloud:

"I am at home, at home!"

"An event worthy of record in universal history," answered the voice of a man speaking somewhat through his nose and teeth.

"And the baron!" cried Kranitski; then he whispered:

"Close the drawing-room door, mother; I must freshen up a little," and from behind the closed door he spoke to those who were in the drawing-room:

"In a moment, my dears, in a moment I shall be at your service."

In the light of the lamp, placed by widow Clemens in the drawing-room, he appeared, indeed, after a few minutes, dressed, his hair arranged, perfumed, elegant with springy movements and an unconstrained smile on his lips. Only his lids were reddened, and on his forehead were many wrinkles which would not be smoothed away.

"A comedian! There is a comedian!" grumbled widow Clemens, returning to the kitchen, with a terrible clatter of overshoes.

The two young men pressed his hand in friendship. It was clear that they liked him.

"Why did you avoid us all day?" inquired Baron Emil. "We waited for you at Borel's—he gave us an excellent dinner. But maybe you are fasting?"

"Let him alone, he has his suffering," put in Maryan. "I am so sorry, *mon bon vieux* (my good old man), that I have persuaded the baron to join me in taking you out. I cannot, of course, leave you a victim to melancholy."

## The Argonauts

Kranitski was moved; gratitude and tenderness were gazing out of his eyes.

"Thanks, thanks! You touch me."

He pressed the hands of both in turn, holding Maryan's hand longer than the baron's, with the words:

"My dear—dear—dear."

The young man smiled.

"Do not grow so tender," said he, "for that injures the interior. You are, however, a son of that generation which possesses an antidote for melancholy."

"What is it?"

"Well, faith, hope, charity, with resignation and—other painted pots. We haven't them, so we go to Tron-tron's, where Lili Kerth sings. We are to give her a supper to-night at Borel's. Borel has promised me everything which the five parts of the world can give."

"As to the problematic nature of that Lili," remarked the baron, "there are moments in which she takes on the superhuman ideal."

"What an idea, dear baron!" burst out Kranitski. "Lili and superhumanity, the ideal! Why, she is a little beast that sings abject things marvellously."

"That is it, that is it!" said the baron, defending his position, "a little beast in the guise of an angel—the singing of chansonettes with such a devil in the body—and at the same time a complexion, a look, a smile, which scatters a kind of mystic, lily perfume. This is precisely that dissonance, that snap, that mystery with which she has conquered Europe. This rouses curiosity; it excites; it is opposed to rules, to harmony—do you understand?"

"Stop, Emil!" cried Maryan, laughing. "You are speaking to the guardian of tombs. He worships harmony yet."



## The Argonauts

Kranitski seemed humiliated somewhat. He passed his palm over his hair, and began timidly:

“But that is true, my dears; I see myself that I am becoming old-fashioned. Men of my time, and I, called a cat a cat, a rogue a rogue. If a Lili like yours put on the airs of an angel we said: ‘Oh, she is a rogue!’ And we knew what to think of the matter. But this confounding of profane with sacred, of the rudest carnalism with a mystic tendency——”

The baron and Maryan laughed.

“For you this is all Greek, and will remain Greek. You were born in the age of harmony, you will remain on the side of harmony. But a truce to talk. Let us go. Come, you will hear Lili Kerth; we shall sup together.”

“Come, we have a place in the carriage for you,” said the baron, supporting young Darvid’s invitation.

Kranitski grew as radiant as if a sun-ray had fallen on his face.

“Very well, my dears, very well, I will go with you; it will distract me, freshen me. A little while only; will you permit?”

“Of course. Willingly. We will wait.”

He hurried to his bedroom, and closed the door behind him. In his head whirled pictures and expressions: the theatre, songs, amusement, supper, conversation, the bright light—everything, in a word, to which he had grown accustomed, and with which he had lived for many years. The foretaste of delight penetrated through his grievous sorrows. After the bitter mixture he felt the taste of caramels in his mouth. He ran toward his dressing-table, but in the middle of the room he stood as if fixed to the floor. His eye met a beautiful heliotype, standing on the bureau in the light of the lamp; from the middle of the room, in a motion-



## The Argonauts

less posture, Kranitski gazed at the face of the woman, which was enclosed in an ornamented frame.

"Poor, dear soul! Noble creature!" whispered he, and his lips quivered, and on his forehead appeared the red spots. Maryan called from beyond the door:

"Hurry, old man! We shall be late!"

A few minutes afterward Kranitski entered the drawing-room. His shoulders were bent; his lids redder than before.

"I cannot—as I love you, I cannot go with you! I feel ill."

"Indeed, he must be ill!" cried Maryan. "See, Emil, how our old man looks! He is changed, is he not?"

"But a moment ago you looked well!" blurted out Emil, and added: "Do not become wearisome, do not get sick. Sick people are fertilizers on the field of death—and sickness is annoying!"

"Splendidly said!" exclaimed Maryan.

"No, no," answered Kranitski, "this is not important, it is an old trouble of the liver. Returned only to-day—you must go without me."

He straightened himself, smiled, tried to move without constraint, but unconquerable suffering was evident on his features and in the expression of his eyes.

"May we send the doctor?" asked Maryan.

"No, no," protested Kranitski, and the baron took him by the arm and turned him toward the bedroom. Though Kranitski's shoulders were bent at that moment, his form was shapely and imposing; the baron, holding his arm, seemed small and frail; he made one think of a fly. In the bedroom he said, with a low voice:

"It is reported in the city that papa Darvid is opposed to my plans concerning Panna Irene. Do you know of this?"

## The Argonauts

For some months the baron had spoken frequently with Kranitski about his plans, taking counsel with him even at times, and begging for indications. Was he not the most intimate friend of that house, and surely an adviser of the family? Kranitski did not think, or even speak, of Baron Emil otherwise than:

“*Ce brave garçon* has the best heart in the world; he is very highly developed and intelligent; yes, very intelligent; and his mother, that dear, angelic baroness, was one of the most beautiful stars among those which have lighted my life.”

So through the man's innate inclination to an optimistic view of mankind, and his grateful memory of “one of the most beautiful stars,” he was always very friendly to the baron and favorable to his plan touching Irene; all the more since he noted in her an inclination toward the baron. So, usually, he gave the young man counsel and answers willingly and exhaustively. This time, however, an expression of constraint and of suffering fell on his face.

“I know not, dear baron; indeed, I can do nothing, for to tell—for I——”

A number of drops of perspiration came out on his forehead, and he added, with difficulty:

“It seems that Panna Irene——”

“Panna Irene,” interrupted the baron, without noticing Kranitski's emotion, “is a sonnet from Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* (The flowers of evil). There is in her something undefined, something contradictory——”

Kranitski made a quick movement.

“My baron——”

“But do you not understand me, dear Pan Arthur? I have no intention of speaking ill of Panna Irene. In my mouth the epithets which I have used are the highest

## The Argonauts

praise. Panna Irene is interesting precisely for this reason, that she is indefinite and complicated. She is a disenchanted woman. She possesses that universal irony which is the stamp of higher natures. Oh, Panna Irene is not a violet unless from the hot-house of Baudelaire! But, just for that reason she rouses curiosity, irritates, *une desabusée—une vierge desabusée*. Do you understand? There is in this the odor of mystery—a new quiver. But with natures of this sort nothing can ever be certain——”

“Hers is a noble nature!” cried Kranitski, with enthusiasm.

“You divide natures into noble and not noble,” said the baron, with a smile; “but I, into annoying and interesting.”

Beyond the door the loud voice of Maryan was heard:

“Emil, I will leave you and go to Tron-tron’s. I will tell Lili Kerth that you remained for the night to nurse a sick friend.”

These words seemed to them so amusing that they laughed, from both sides of the closed door, simultaneously.

“Good!” cried the baron. You will create for me the fame of a good Christian. As the Brandenburger fears only God, I fear only the ridiculous, and go.”

A few minutes later the two friends were no longer in the dwelling of Kranitski, who was sitting on his long chair again, with drooping head, turning in his fingers the golden cigarette-case. The street outside the window was lonely enough, so the rumble of the departing carriage was audible. Kranitski followed it with his ear, and when it was silent he regretted passionately for a moment that he had not gone to where people were singing and jesting, and eating, and drinking in bright light, in waves of laughter. But, straightway, he felt an invincible distaste for all that.

## The Argonauts

He was so sad, crushed, sick. Why had not those two young friends of his remained longer? He had rendered them the most varied services frequently, he had simply been at their service always, and had loved them; especially Maryan, the dear child—and many others. How many times had he nursed them, also, in sickness, consoled them, rescued them, amused them. Now, when he cannot run after them, as a dog after its mistress, his only comrades are darkness and silence.

Darkness reigned in the little drawing-room, silence of the grave in the whole dwelling. A clatter of overshoes broke this silence; widow Clemens stood in the kitchen door. On her high forehead, above her gray eyebrows, shone the glass eyes of her spectacles; her left hand was covered with a man's sock which she was darning. She stood in the door and looked at Kranitski, bent, grown old, buried in gloomy silence, and shook her head. Then, as quietly as ever was possible for her, she approached the long-chair, sat on a stool which was near it, and asked:

“Well, why are you silent, and chewing sorrow alone? Talk with me, you will feel easier.”

As he gazed at her silently, she asked in a still lower tone:

“Well, the woman? Did she love you greatly? Was her love real? How did you and she come to your senses?”

After a few minutes' hesitation, or thought, Kranitski, with his elbows on the edge of the chair, and his forehead on his palms, said:

“I can tell all, mother, for you are not of our society, and you are noble, faithful; the only one on earth who remains with me.”

Throughout the silent chamber was heard, as it were, the sound of a trumpet: that sound was made by widow

## The Argonauts

Clemens, who had drawn from her pocket a coarse handkerchief and held it to her nose. Her eyes were moist. Kranitski quivered and squirmed, but continued:

“When we met the first time after parting, the spring season was around us. You know that we parted only because I had too little fortune to marry a portionless maiden, and my mother would not hear of my marrying a governess. Soon after, that rich man married her. Fiu! fiu! what became of that governess, that girl more timid than a violet? She became a society lady, full of life, elegance, style—but springtime breathed around us, memories of the village, of the flowers, of the fields, of our earliest, heartfelt emotions. Did she love her husband? Poor, dear, soul! It seems that at first she was attached to him, but he left her, neglected her, grasped after millions throughout the whole world. He was strong, unbending—she was ever alone. Alone in society! Alone in the house—for the children were small yet, and she so sensitive and weak, needing friendship and the fondling of a devoted heart. I fell on my knees in spirit before her—she felt that. He, when going away, left me near her as an adviser, a guardian for the time, even a protector, yes, a pro-tec-tor—the *parvenu*! the idiot! So wise, yet so stupid—ha! ha! ha!”

Sneering, vengeful laughter contorted Kranitski's face, the red spots spread over his brows and covered half of his forehead, which was drawn now into thick wrinkles.

“Do not vex yourself, Tulek, do not vex yourself, you will be ill,” urged widow Clemens; but once his confessions were begun he went on with them.

“For a year or more there was nothing between us. We were friends, but she held me at a distance; she struggled. You, mother, know if I had success with women——”

“You had, to your eternal ruin, you had!” blurted out widow Clemens.

## The Argonauts

“From youth I had the gift of reading; I owe much to it.”

“Ei! you owe much to it! What do you owe to it? Your sin against God, and the waste of your life!” said the widow, ready for a dispute, but he went on without noting that.

“Once she was weak after a violent attack of neuralgia; it was late in the evening, the great house was empty and dark, the children were sleeping—I gave her the attention that a brother or a mother would give; I was careful; I hid what was happening within me; I acted as though I were watching over a sick child which was dear to me. I entertained her with conversation; I spoke in a low voice; I gave her medicine and confectionery. Afterward I began to read. More than once she had said that my reading was music. I was reading Musset. You do not know, mother, who Musset is. He is the poet of love—of that love exactly which the world calls forbidden. She wanted something from the neighboring chamber; I went for it. When I returned our eyes met, and—well, I read no more that evening.”

He was barely able to utter the last words; he covered his face with his handkerchief, rested his head on the arm of the long-chair, was motionless; wept, perhaps. Widow Clemens bent down, the corner of her coarse handkerchief came from her pocket, and through the chamber that sound of a trumpet was heard for the second time. Then she drew her bench up still nearer, and, with her hand in the stocking-foot, touched Kranitski's arm, and whispered:

“Say no more, Tulek; despair not! Let God up there judge her and you. He is a strict judge, but merciful! I am sorry for you, but also for her, poor thing! What is to be done? The heart is not stone, man is not an angel! Only drive off despair! Everything passes, and your sorrow also will pass. You may be better off in the world than you

## The Argonauts

now are. You may yet enjoy pleasant quiet in Lipovka, in your own cottage. Stefanek and I may think out something, so that you will escape from the mud of this city."

Kranitski made no answer; the woman spoke on:

"I have had another letter from Stefanek."

"What does that honest man write?" asked Kranitski.

The widow flushed up in anger:

"It is true that he is honest, and there is no need to call him that—as if through favor, or sneering. Arabian adventure! He is only my godson, but better than men of high birth. He writes that management in Lipovka goes well; that again he has set out a hundred fruit-trees in the garden; that in four weeks he will come and bring a little money."

"Money!" whispered Kranitski; "but that is well!"

"It is surely well, for that Jew would have taken your furniture if I had not pushed him down the steps, and a second time begged him to wait." She laughed. "To push him down was easier than to beg, for I am strong, and he is as small as a fly. Well I almost kissed his hands, and he promised to wait. 'For widow Clemens I will do this,' said he, 'because she is a servant who is like a mother.' Indeed, I am like a mother! I have no children, I have no one of my own in the world—I have only you."

Kranitski looked at her and began to shake his head with a slow movement. She, too, fixing her fiery and gloomy eyes on his eyes, shook slowly her head, which was covered with a great cap.

The lamp burning on the bureau threw its white light on those two heads, which, discoursing sadly, continued their melancholy converse without words; it shone also on the varied collection of pipes at the wall, and cast passing gleams on the golden cigarette-case which Kranitski turned in his hand.



## CHAPTER V

DARVID was in splendid humor—he had bought at auction a house and broad grounds very reasonably. He cared little for the house—it was a rubbishy old pile which he would remove very soon—but the grounds, covered then with an extensive garden, represented an uncommonly profitable transaction. Situated near one of the railroad stations, he would, of course, receive a high price for it, because of the need to put there a great public edifice.

Darvid would sell the ground to those who needed it, and then make proposals to build the edifice. This was the third undertaking which had fallen to him since his return, a few months before. What of that, when the most important, for which he would have given the other three willingly, had not fallen yet to him, and he did not know well what had been done concerning it? This affair did not let him sleep sometimes, still it did not disincline him from working at that which he had begun already.

The day was clear, slightly frosty, myriads of brilliants were glittering in the white rime which covered the trees, and in the snow which lay on the extensive garden. Darvid, in company with a surveyor, an engineer, and an architect, walked through the garden, but the object of his walk was in no way the contemplation of nature bound up under marbles, and alabasters sprinkled with brilliants. The engineer brought him a plan for the purchase of the place, and supported the interests of his employers energetically; the surveyor and the architect spoke of their part, pointed

## The Argonauts

out with gestures the proportions and various points of the open area. Darvid, in a closely fitting fur coat, finished with an original and very costly collar, with a shining hat on his head, walked over the ground with even tread; he listened rather than spoke, there was a silent satisfaction in his smile, when suddenly an immense brightness reflected from a tree, directly in front, dazzled his eyesight. The tree, which resembled a lofty pillar, had on each of its branches a plume, cut as it were delicately from alabaster, every feather of this plume flamed like a torch lighted in a rainbow. Sheafs of rainbow gleams shot out of that wonderful carving, and from that fountain of many-colored light. Darvid put his glasses on his nose suddenly, and said with a painful twist of the mouth:

“What unendurable light!”

The architect looked at the tree and said, with a smile:

“No man, not even a Greek master, has ever finished a pillar like that.”

“The only pity is that it cannot be used,” replied Darvid, smiling also.

“You are not a lover of nature, that is true; while I——” began the engineer.

“On the contrary, on the contrary. During intervals I have looked at nature here and there,” said Darvid, playfully. “But to become her lover, as you say, I have not had leisure. To love nature is a luxury which iron toil does not know—a luxury which must have leisure.”

With these words he turned from the beautiful work of nature and intended to go on, but again he halted. He found himself at the picket fence, which divided the garden from the street, and in the movement of the street he saw something which occupied him greatly.

It was the hour of departure for one of the railroad

## The Argonauts

trains. The street was wide, and the ground on both sides of it was not entirely occupied yet with houses, many carriages on wheels, and a multitude of sleighs were hastening toward the near railway station. The sleighs shot forward with clinking harness, the snow under wheels squeaked complainingly, the drivers uttered brief shouts. The hats of men and women, various kinds of furs, the liveries of coachmen, the horses puffing steam, covered here and there with colored nets, formed a motley, changing line, moving forward with a rattle and an outcry along the white snow, in an atmosphere glittering from frost and sunlight.

One of the carriages looked like a flower garden. Roses, camelias, pinks, and violets were creeping out—simply pouring out—through its windows. The carriage was filled with bouquets, garlands, baskets. Among these, as in a flood of various colors, appeared in the heart of it the broad-rimmed hat of a woman. Immediately behind the carriage rushed a sleigh drawn by a pair of grand horses, the driver wearing an enormous fur collar, and in the sleigh were two young men, at whose feet again was a basket of flowers, but the finest and costliest, very rare and expensive orchids. The carriage and sleigh shot forward through the many-colored crowd of the street, as if some enchanted vision of spring had risen through the snow and then vanished.

“Who is that lady in the carriage filled with flowers?” asked Darvid, turning to his companions.

“Bianca Biannetti.”

That was a name which needed no commentary. Darvid smiled, with satisfaction. It was not wonderful that Maryan and the little baron were escorting to the station that woman of European fame, and were taking flowers to her.

## The Argonauts

Of course, of course. He himself a number of times in his life—and if it was not oftener, it was because time had failed him.

“There will be an amusing history to-day at the station,” said the engineer. “A special train for Bianea; it is to leave five minutes after the regular one.”

“For what purpose?” asked the architect.

“It is easy to divine: to have five minutes longer to enjoy the society of the great singer.”

“An extra train! That is madness!” said Darvid. “Who did this?”

The engineer and architect exchanged significant glances, and the former answered:

“Your son.”

The skin on Darvid’s face quivered, but he answered with perfect composure:

“Ah, true! I remember Maryan told me something of this. I persuaded him a little, but he insisted. What is to be done? *Il faut que la jeunesse se passe* (youth must have its day).”

Then he gave his hand to the three men in farewell:

“I am sorry that we cannot finish our discussions to-day, but I remember an important affair. I beg you, gentlemen, to come to-morrow at the usual hour of my receptions.”

He raised his hat and left them.

“To the station! Hurry!” said he to the driver while entering the carriage.

At the station stood a row of cars with a locomotive sending up steam. A throng of people were moving toward the snow-covered platform, and hurrying to the train. Darvid came out also, searching with his eyes for a youthful face which filled his sleepless nights with care. At first he could not find it, but when many people had

## The Argonauts

entered the train, those assembled for the passive rôle of spectators formed a group and turned their glances toward one point upon the platform. There in the hands of a number of people bloomed a garden of beautiful flowers, and near them two persons were conversing with great animation. The opera singer was an Italian, a beautiful brunette, with eyes blazing like dark stars. Conversing with her in her own language was a young man, younger than she, very youthful, light-haired, shapely, elegantly dressed. At some steps from this pair, in a careless posture, with an unoccupied air, stood Baron Emil, fragile and red-haired.

The bell, summoning passengers, was heard in the frosty air for the second time. The lady, with a charming smile, bowed in sign of farewell, and made a step toward the train, but the young man barred the way with a movement made adroitly, talking meanwhile, and holding her under the determined glance of his blue eyes. Without showing alarm she delayed, smiled, and listened.

Darvid stood on the platform, lost in that crowd of the curious, and snatches of conversation struck his ear.

"She will not go!" said one man.

"She will! There is time enough yet!" said another.

"He detains her purposely, so that she may not go."

"He does, for she is beautiful. Her smile is as charming as her song."

"He is a daring boy," said some third man near Darvid's other ear. "Look, look, how he talks her down purposely—poor woman, she will go back to the city beaten."

"But no! That would be an impoliteness on his part."

"Who is this handsome young man with golden hair?" asked some woman.

"Young Darvid. The son of the great financier. How young! He is a child."

## The Argonauts

"A man with millions ripens quickly, like a peach in sunlight."

"What language are they speaking? I cannot hear, but it is not French."

"Italian; she is Italian."

"But he chatters in that language as if he were her compatriot."

"Millions are like the tongues at Pentecost," said the man who had mentioned peaches, "whoever is touched by them speaks every language on earth right away."

All the passengers had vanished in the cars, the doors of which were fastened now with loud clinking. This time the opera singer stepped forward quickly, but young Darvid spoke a few words which brought to her face astonishment and the most beautiful smile in the world; she nodded, agreed to something, gave thanks for something in the same way that kindly queens consent to receive marks of the highest honor from their subjects.

In the crowd surrounding Darvid someone laughed:

"Ah, he is a stunning fellow! he will not let her go!"

"How handsome he is, that young Darvid!" said a woman.

"He looks like a young prince," added another.

"But what will come of this? She will not go."

"She will go!"

"She will not go!"

"I will bet!"

"I will bet!"

In a moment a number of bets were made behind Darvid as to whether the woman, who was talking to his son, would go from the city that day or not. On his thin lips a smile of satisfaction appeared, the eyes from behind his glasses looked at his son with an expression which was almost mild.

## The Argonauts

A young prince! Yes, that is true. What freedom of manner, what grace! What fine disregard for the common throng gazing at him! Triumphant even with women! That woman, famous throughout Europe, is simply devouring him with those black eyes of hers.

The bell was heard on the platform for the third time, and at the same moment a prolonged whistle pierced the air. The wheels of the train began to turn with a slow, measured movement.

"It is over!" cried someone in the crowd. "She has not gone!"

"I have lost the bet!" said a number of voices.

"How splendid that that handsome youth has carried his point," said a woman.

Meanwhile, from the remotest end of the platform, new whistling of a locomotive came up, and the measured beat of wheels on the rails was heard; at some distance a certain black mass appeared, it pushed forward faster and faster, until under the smoke came out clearly the cylinder of a locomotive, drawing behind it a short row of wagons. This was the train, and small, fresh, elegant. This train glittered in the sunlight with its yellow brass fittings, gleamed in its sapphire-colored varnish. Its rich interior, with cushions of purple velvet, was visible through the windows. A conductor opened the door of a car and stood near it in an expectant position. Maryan, with a motion of request, indicated it to the celebrated singer.

Now the people standing on the platform understood everything, and fell into enthusiasm. The spirit, which rose to that plan and threw out a large sum of money for the sake of it, struck the imagination and roused the sympathy of people inclined to gold and strange acts, without reference to their object or value. On the platform was



## The Argonauts

heard the sharp clapping of some tens of hands, and soon after the locomotive whistled once more, and that small, special train pushed forward into space, only five minutes later than the regular train which preceded it.

Darvid stood near the door of the station whence he could see his son, who passed with slow step along a part of the platform. And he looked at him with unquiet curiosity, for something unexpected in Maryan astonished him. In contradiction to what one might expect, and which seemed natural, there was not in the expression of face and the movements of Maryan either the pleasure of youth at something accomplished, or sorrow at the departure of the woman, for whom he had accomplished it. When a moment before applause was heard on the platform, he looked around and cast on the hand-clapping crowd a passing glance, as indifferent as if they were an object not worthy of contempt, even. Now, too, his whole person expressed perfect indifference, nay, even annoyance, which contracted his lips, and yellowed the rosiness of his round cheeks somewhat. In his blue eyes, fixed glassily on the distance, was depicted something like dissatisfaction, or a feeling of disappointment, a dreaming, or a pondering in vain over deceitful visions which pass over space, but which no one can seize upon. He did not see his father, for his glassy eyes were looking far away at some point. Even the baron did not see Darvid; he was searching for something in his pocketbook carefully, till he took out a ten-rouble note and threw it at the porters who had borne in the baggage and flowers of the prima-donna. At the same time he cast these words through his teeth at them:

“I have no small money!”

Maryan, without rousing himself from thought, said, as if mechanically:

## The Argonauts

“It is wonderful!”

“What?” asked the baron.

“That everything in the world is so little, so little.”

“Except my appetite, which is immense at this moment,” cried the baron.

“But those fabulous sums which Maryan must expend!” thought Darvid going to his carriage; before he reached it he heard other snatches of conversation:

“To throw away so much money for a few moments’ talk with a beautiful woman—that is a character!”

“It promises trouble, does it not?”

“Especially for papa.”

“He has as many debts, no doubt, as curly hairs on his head.”

“He borrows, of course, on the security of papa’s pocket.”

“Or his death.”

Others said:

“In such hands ill-gotten gains will go to the devil quickly.”

“Why ill-gotten gains?”

“Well, can you imagine Saint Francis of Assisi making millions?”

While his carriage was rolling along the streets of the city, Darvid’s head was full of conflicting ideas. True, true; that green youth had a special capacity for devouring the golden sands of Pactolus! But in what a charming and princely fashion he did that! Darvid was proud of his son, and at the same time greatly dismayed and troubled; for this could not last. That lad was making debts in view of—his father’s death. And this absolute idleness! What good was a man who did nothing? The results also of idleness were evident in him: a certain premature withering, a cer-

## The Argonauts

tain dreaming without object—a handsome fellow! he looked as if born to a princely coronet. As Darvid was ascending the marble steps of his mansion he said to the Swiss:

“When Pan Maryan comes home say that I request him to come to me.”

Darvid passed an hour or more in his study, alone, over papers, writing, taking notes, examining various accounts, and letters; but over his face, from time to time, ran a disagreeable quiver, and the nervous movements of his hand caused sheets of paper to rustle unpleasantly. At last the door of the antechamber opened and Maryan appeared, hat in hand.

“Good-day, my father,” began he on entering. “I am glad that you invited me, for it is long since I have had the pleasure of talking with you. We both have been greatly occupied. For some weeks Bianca Biannetti has taken all my time.”

He was perfectly unconstrained, though not at all glad-some in his manner. Darvid, standing at the round table, looked at his son quickly.

“Are you in love with that singer?” asked he.

Only then did Maryan laugh unaffectedly, almost loudly.

“What a question, my father; love is a sanctuary, built on a poppy-seed; love then is sacred; while my fancy for that beautiful Bianca——”

“Is a poppy-seed which you are transporting through the world on special trains,” finished Darvid.

“Have you heard of that, father?”

“I have seen it.”

“Ah, you were at the station! Strange that I did not see you.”

He made a gesture of contempt with his hand.

“I was disappointed. I planned that surprise for Bianca,

## The Argonauts

and felt sure of a lively pleasure. When the time came I convinced myself that the affair was a trifle, not new, and, like everything, stupid. So it is always: what imagination builds up in a long time, criticism overturns in a twinkling. It is impossible to invent anything important. The world is so aged that it has come to us a worn-out old rag."

He took a seat on one of the armchairs surrounding the table, and put his hat on the carpet. Darvid replied without changing his posture:

"Nothing wonderful; when imagination builds up stupidities criticism overturns the building in a twinkling——"

"Who can be sure that he is building up wisdom?" interrupted Maryan.

Then, taking a cigarette-case from his pocket, he asked:

"Do you permit, father?" Then, handing the cigarette-case, with great politeness, to Darvid, he added:

"But, perhaps, you will smoke also?"

Darvid, with thick wrinkles between his brows, shook his head and sat down.

"Why did you leave the university soon after I went away?" asked he. "I inquired of you touching this several times by letter, but you have never given me a definite answer."

"I beg pardon for that, father, but I am wonderfully slow in writing letters. I will explain all to you willingly in words——"

Darvid interrupted:

"I have no time for long talk, so tell me at once. Have you no love for science?"

Maryan let out a streak of smoke from his lips, and spoke with deliberation:

"I feel no repugnance whatever toward science. I read much, and mental curiosity is just one of the most emphatic

## The Argonauts

traits of my individuality. In childhood I swallowed books in monumental numbers, but I have never learned school lessons. All were astonished at this, and still the thing is simple, it lies quite on the surface. Common individualities yield to rules, but energetic and higher ones will not endure them. Rules and duty are stables in which humanity confines its beasts, to prevent them from injuring fields under culture. Cattle and sheep stand patiently in the enclosures, higher organisms break them down and go out into freedom. I need absolute freedom in all things; and, therefore, I stopped going to inns of science, which give out this science at stated hours, in certain sorts and doses. Though, even in this regard, I showed many good intentions, owing to the entreaties and persuasions of mamma. From legal studies I betook myself to the study of nature, and turned from that to philosophy, thinking that something would occupy me, and that I should be able to still that real storm of desperation which seized poor mamma. But I was not able. The professors were contemptible, my fellow-students a rabble. Society relations amused me in those days, and occupied me: imagination swept me farther and higher. So I stopped a labor which was annoying and irritating, and which, moreover, had no object."

He quenched his cigarette stump in the ash-pan, and, sinking again into the deep armchair, continued:

"So far as I have been able to observe, people study science regularly for one of two purposes: either they intend to devote themselves to what is called the salvation of mankind, or they need to win a morsel of bread for their stomachs. Neither of these objects could be mine; for, as to the first, I hold the principle of individuality carried quite to anarchy. The so-called salvation of society is, for

## The Argonauts

our decadent epoch, a fable, quite impossible; and the naked truth is, that each man lives for himself, and in his own fashion. The man whom fate serves well passes his life in a manner more or less agreeable; if it serves him ill—he perishes. Luck, and the chance meeting of causes, arranges everything. It is impossible to turn the earth into a general paradise, just as it is to change a small planet into an immense one. The salvation of society is one of the narcotics invented to lull the sufferings of people. Altruists possess a whole drug-shop of these narcotics; whoever wishes has the right to use them; but, as for me, I prefer not to be lulled to sleep. I am an individualist, and do not understand why Pavel must suffer for the purpose of decreasing the pains of Gavel. Let Gavel, as well as Pavel, think of himself; and, if they are clever, they will both help themselves somehow without turning to labelled bottles. This is my conviction about one of the objects for which people make regular studies in science. As to the other——”

He took out his cigarette-case again, and, lighting a cigarette, finished:

“As to the other object, that is a simple thing; since being your son, my father, I shall not need to bake my own bread. Such is my confession of faith which I have laid down before you; all the more readily since I have long cherished a genuine reverence for your strength of mind and independence. I am certain, too, that by no one could I be understood better than by you, my father.”

He was mistaken. The man to whom he was talking so fluently and politely did not understand him in any sense.

For the first time in his life, perhaps, Darvid did not understand the person with whom he was talking. The millionaire was astounded. He had expected to find a frivolous youth, whom passions had pushed into extravagance and

## The Argonauts

idleness; meanwhile, a reasoning, disenchanted sage sat before him, with bitterness on his lips and irony in his speech and eyes. That sour wisdom, the measureless belief in himself and his opinions, with the independence which accompanied it, were found in a slender, delicate, and rosy-faced youth, with eyes as blue as forget-me-nots, and came from lips slightly faded, but marked by a tiny, youthful moustache. Besides, the perfect elegance of manner, the estheticism and irreproachable grace in movements, in voice, in compliments, the utterance of which he rounded very beautifully.

Darvid was astounded. He had found no time in his life to observe the new directions which thought and character were taking in the world; nor for observing the changed forms in which time moulds the various generations of mankind. He was dumbfounded, speechless, and only after a while did an ironical smile appear on his lips—that lad with his theories was absurd!

“All that you have said is simply ridiculous. You are making a principle out of a thorough absence of principles. At your age such opinions and such coolness are incredible. At your age, which is almost that of a child, and with your scant training, they are, out and out, ridiculous.”

Maryan, with a quick movement, raised his head and looked with astonishment at his father. He, too, had expected something entirely different.

“Ridiculous!” cried he; “what does this mean, father? This is not argument. I felt sure that we should agree perfectly. With the profoundest astonishment I see that this is not the case. How is it, my father, then, you do not take up the motto: each for himself, and in his own way? Still, it is impossible for any man to carry contempt for all painted pots farther than you do; than you have carried it all your



## The Argonauts

life. But, perhaps, this difference in our opinions is only apparent? I beg you to give me argument. The charge of ridiculousness is not argument. I may be ridiculous, and be right. A lack of principles? Very well; principles form one of the most brightly painted of all pots, and, therefore, it is most difficult to see the clay. But, never mind; I ask for a closer description. What principles do you value, father?"

Darvid, with a strong quiver in his face, answered:

"What? Oh, moral. Naturally, moral principles——"

"Yes, yes, but I ask for an accurate definition. What are they called; what are the names of those principles?"

Darvid was silent. What are they called? Was he a priest, or a governess, to break his head over such questions? If it were a question of law, mathematics, architecture, guilds, banks—but he had never occupied himself with morals; he had not had the time. A deep anger began to possess him, and his words hissed somewhat through his lips; when, after some silence, he added:

"My dear, you have made a mistake in the address. It is not the office of a father to instil moral principles into children. That is the province of mothers. Fathers have no time for that work. Go back in memory to your childhood; recall the principles which your mother implanted in you, and you will find an answer to your question."

Maryan laughed.

"What you say, father, reminds me of one of my friends who writes books. A poor devil, but we receive him into our set, for he has talent—that legitimizes. Well, on a time, someone asked him: 'What do you do when, in writing, you meet a difficulty?' 'I try to overcome it,' answered he. 'But if you can't overcome it?' 'Then I dodge; or, I run to one side like a rabbit, and avoid say-

## The Argonauts

ing that which I know not how to say.' Well, you have acted, dear father, like this author. You have dodged! Ha! ha! ha!"

He laughed, but Darvid grew gloomier and stiffer. It was strange, but true, that in presence of that professor he felt himself more and more a pupil.

"Let us leave poor, dear mamma in peace," continued Maryan. "She is the impersonation of charm and sweetness. If there is still anything of this sort which for me is not a painted pot yet, it is the tenderness which I feel for mamma. She has spoken to me often, indeed; and she speaks, even now, of principles, but the best and dearest of women is only a woman. Sentiment, routine, and, besides, want of logic: theory without end and practice nowhere, is not that the case with women? You know them better than I, father; for you have had more time to explore this part of the universe."

His azure eyes glittered with sparks; his golden curls fell low on his white forehead; and from his lips, shaded by a tiny mustache, the words came out with increasing boldness and fluency, and more thickly intermingled with a sarcastic smile:

"As for me, were I an old maid, I should become a Sister of Charity; for that office has always a certain position in the world, and the stiff bonnet casts a saving shadow on wrinkles. Since I am who I am, I think thus of principles: they depend on the place; the time; the geographical position; and the evolution which society is accomplishing. If the heavens had created me an ancient Greek, my principle would have been to battle for freedom against Asiatics, and to be enamoured of a beautiful boy. If in the Middle Ages, I should have fought for the honor of my lady and burnt men alive on blazing piles. In the Orient, I should

## The Argonauts

possess, openly, a number of wives, accommodated only to my wish; in the West, principle commands a man to pretend that he has only one wife. In Europe, it is my duty to honor my father and mother; in the Fiji Islands it would be criminal for me not to put them to death at the proper moment. Wretched makeup—hash, with which our age does not wish now to feed itself. Our age is too old, and its palate is too practised, not to distinguish figs from pomegranates. We children of an advanced age, decadents, know well that man may win much, but will never gain absolute truth. It does not exist. All things are relative. My only principle is, that I exist, and use my will, my only interest is to know how to will. Many other things might be said, but what use? Still, I will add to what is already said. You, my father, are an uncommonly wise man. You must think, therefore, just as I do; you speak differently only because people have the habit of talking in that way—to children!”

Darvid seemed to hear this speech out, only mechanically; and when Maryan, with a short and somewhat sharp laugh, pronounced the last words and was silent, the following words broke from him more quickly than words had ever left his mouth before:

“Not true. You are greatly mistaken. I think and act differently from what you say. I have not had time to meditate over the theory of principles; but all my life has rested on one of them—on labor. Skilled and iron labor was my principle, and it has made me what I am——”

“Pardon me for interrupting,” exclaimed Maryan. “I beg you earnestly, but permit one question: What was the object of your labor? What was the object? That will settle everything; for a principle can be found only in the object, not in the labor, which is only the means of obtain-

## The Argonauts

ing an end. What was your object, my father? Of course, it was not the salvation of the world, but the satisfaction of your own desires—your own—not any put on you beforehand, and accepted obediently; but your own individual desires. The object of them was great wealth—a high position. Through labor you strive to acquire these, and I do not see here any principle except that which I myself possess—namely: it is necessary to know how to will. In the very essence of things we agree; only I, with the sincerest homage, have recognized in you a master. Frequently have I thought with what perfect logic, with what unbending will, you have freed yourself from the labels which other men, even wise ones for the period, have never ceased from pasting on their persons. If in your career you had knocked against painted pots, labelled: birthplace, fatherland, humanity, charity, etc., you would have gone at considerably less speed, and not gone so far. But you were astonishingly logical. With amazing strength and unsparingness you have known how to will. It is from this point precisely that I looked, and I was filled with real admiration. During your absence, of more than three years, I called you frequently, in thought, a superhuman. Friederich Nietzsche imagined such men as you when——”

He stopped here, raising a glance full of astonishment at his father's face. Darvid, very pale, with quivering temples, stood up, leaned firmly on the table, and said:

“Enough!”

Unable to conceal the violent emotion which he felt, under an ironical tone and laugh, he continued:

“Enough of this mockery of reasoning and argument, and of all this empty twaddle. If it was your intention to pass an examination before me, I give you five with plus. You have fluent speech, and quite a rich vocabulary of

## The Argonauts

words. But I have no time for those things and proceed to facts and figures. The life which you are leading is impossible, and you *must* change. You *must* begin another life."

He put emphasis on the word *must*. Maryan looked at his father with an amazement which seemed to take away his speech.

"You have not ended your twenty-third year yet, and the history of your romances has acquired broad notoriety in the world a number of times——"

Maryan recovered from his amazement slowly.

"Affairs so completely personal——" began he with a hesitating voice.

Darvid, paying no attention to the interruption, continued:

"The sum which you lost in betting at the last races was, even for my fortune, considerable—thirty thousand."

Maryan had now almost recovered his balance.

"If this shrift is indispensable I will correct the figures—thirty-six thousand."

"The suppers which you give to friends, male and female, have the fame of Lucullus feasts."

Maryan, with sparks of hidden irritation in his eyes, laughed.

"An exaggeration! Our poor Borel has no idea of Lucullus, but that he plunders us, unmercifully, is true."

"He knows how to will!" threw in Darvid.

Maryan raised his eyes to him, and said:

"He is making a fortune."

This time, in his turn, astonishment was depicted on the face of Darvid, indignant to that degree that a slight flush appeared on cheeks generally pale.

"Folly!" hissed he, and immediately restrained himself. "You are incurring enormous debts; on what security?"

## The Argonauts

Maryan, at least apparently, had regained perfect confidence in himself. With eyes slightly blinking he seemed to look at a picture on the wall.

"That is the affair of my creditors," said he. "They must have this in view, that I am your son."

"But if I should wish not to pay your debts?"

Maryan smiled with incredulity.

"I doubt that. Such a smash-up, as refusal to pay my debts, would injure you also, my father. Besides, the sums are not fabulous."

"How much?"

"I cannot tell the exact figure, but approximately they are——"

He mentioned figures. Darvid repeated them indifferently.

"About a quarter of a million. Very good. I shall be far from ruin this time, but in future—I make no reproaches; for to do so would be to lose time. What has dropped into the past is lost. But the future *must* be different."

On the word *must* he laid emphasis again. With a quick movement he put his glasses on his nose, and taking a cigarette from a beautiful box, he put the end of it at the flame of one of the candles burning on the desk. He seemed perfectly calm; but behind his eyeglasses steel sparks flew, and the cigarette did not ignite, held by fingers which trembled somewhat. Turning from the desk to the table, he said:

"I will pay your debts at once; and the pension which, three years ago, I appointed to you—that is six thousand yearly—I leave at your disposal. But you will leave the city two weeks from now, and go to——"

He named a place very remote, situated in the heart of the Empire.

## The Argonauts

"In that place is an iron mill, and also glass-works; in these two establishments I am one of the chief shareholders. You will take the office designated by the director, who is a shareholder, and a friend of mine; under his guidance and indications you will begin a life of labor."

In Maryan's eyes again appeared amazement without limit; but on his lips quivered a smile somewhat incredulous, somewhat jeering.

"What is this to be?" asked he. "Penance for sins? Punishment?"

"No," answered Darvid; "only a school. Not a school for reasoning, for you have too much of that already; but for character. You must learn three things: economy, modesty, and labor."

Quenching in the ash-pan the fifth or sixth cigarette, Maryan inquired:

"But if—perchance—I should not agree to enter that school?"

Darvid answered immediately:

"In that case you will remain here, but without means of independent existence. You will be free to live under my roof, and appear at the parental table; but you will not receive a personal income of any kind. At the same time, I will publish in the newspapers that I shall not pay your debts hereafter. What I have said, I will do. Take your choice."

That he would do what he had said any man who saw him then might feel certain.

The bloom on Maryan's cheeks took on a brick color; his eyes filled with steel sparks.

"The system of taking fortresses through famine," said he, in an undertone; and, then with head inclined somewhat, and eyes fixed on the carpet, he said:



## The Argonauts

“I am astonished. I thought, father, that in spite of my seeing you rarely, I knew you well; now I find that I did not know you at all. I admired in you that power of thought which was able to strike from you the bonds of every prejudice; now, I have convinced myself that your ideas are not only patriarchal, but despotic. This is a deception which pains. I wonder myself, even, that this affects me so powerfully; but in falling from heights one must always hurt, even the point of the nose. This is one lesson more not to climb heights. I have in me a cursed imagination which leads me astray. One more mirage has vanished; one more painted pot has lost its colors. What is to be done?”

He said this in a low voice, biting his lower lip at times; he was pained in reality, and deeply. After a while he continued:

“What is to be done? I must be resigned to the disappointment which has met me; but as to disposing of my person so absolutely, I protest. Had it been your intention, my father, to make a mill-hand of me, you should have begun that work earlier. My individuality is now developed, and cannot be pounded in through the gate of a given cemetery. To rear me as a great lord and permit—even demand—during a rather long period that I should use all the good things of society, and be distinguished most brilliantly for your sake, and then thrust into a school of economy, modesty, and labor is—pardon me if I call the thing by its name—illogical and devoid of sequence. I might even add, that it lacks justice; but I do not wish to defend myself with arguments taken from painted pots. One thing is certain—namely this: that I shall not be the victim of patriarchal despotism.”

He rose, took his hat from the carpet, and calmly, ele-

## The Argonauts

gantly, but with a brick-colored flush on his cheeks, and a blue, swollen vein on his forehead, he added:

“I know not what I shall do. It may happen me to be the creator of my own destiny. I know how to be this; and I shall decide more readily to be a workman at my own will than at the will of another. I shall surely leave this place. Expatriation has come to my mind more than once, but not in the direction in which you have seen fit to indicate. Besides, I do not know yet, for this has fallen suddenly. I shall look into myself; I shall look around me. Meanwhile, I must go; for I have promised one of my friends to be at a certain collector’s place at a given hour, to examine a very curious picture. It is an original; an authentic Overbeck. A rare thing; a real find—I take farewell of you, my father.”

He made a low bow and went out. Exquisite elegance did not desert him for an instant; still, in the expression of his face, and especially his excited complexion, and his voice, too, indignation and distress were evident in a degree which bordered on suffering.

The door of the antechamber opened and closed. Darvid was as if petrified. What was this? What had happened? Was it possible that this should be the end of the conversation, and that such a conversation should end in Overbeck, and a perfectly elegant bow? Wonderful man! Yes, for that was no petulant child, with childish requests, evasions, outbursts; but a premature man, almost an old man. A reasoner; a pessimist; a sceptic. A genial head! What elegance! What command of self. A princely exterior. Marvellous man! What could he do with him? If he had asked for forgiveness; had promised, in part, even to accommodate himself to his father’s wishes; even to change his life a little. But this iron persistence and unshaken

## The Argonauts

confidence in himself, joined with perfect politeness, and with reason which would not yield a step! What was to be done with him? Fortresses are taken sometimes through famine; but, suppose it is resolved on everything except yielding. Well, he would try; he would keep his word; he would see.

A servant at the door announced:

“The horses are ready.”

He was invited to dine at the house of one of the greatest dignitaries in the city. He would have given much to remain that day in quiet. But he had to go. In his position—with his business—to offend such a personage might involve results that would be very disagreeable. Besides, he would meet someone there whose good will also was necessary. He did not wish to go; but he would do violence to himself and go. Is not that the firm and strict observance of principle? What had that milksop said? That he did not recognize principles, and would not observe them? Who could treat himself more sternly and mercilessly than he? How many of the most beautiful flowers of life had he cast aside; how many sleepless nights had he passed, and borne even physical toil for the principle of untiring labor—merciless iron labor!

In a dress-coat, his bosom covered with the finest of linen, and with glittering diamond buttons, with ruddy side-whiskers, a pale and lean face, unbending, irreproachable in dress, and correct in posture, he stood in the middle of his study, and was drawing on his light gloves very slowly. Taking his hat he thought that he felt a decided sourness and a bitterness in his person, which would make the most famous dishes, on the table of the dignitary, ill-tasting. What was to be done? He had to go. Principle beyond all things else!

## The Argonauts

When he was descending the stairway, in his fur-coat and hat, he heard the rustle of silk garments on the first landing, and a rather loud conversation in English. He recognized the voices of his elder daughter and Baron Emil; but he saw Malvina first; she was in front of the young couple. With elegant politeness he pushed up to the wall so that his wife might have more room, and raising his hat, with the most agreeable smile which his lips could give, he asked: "The ladies are coming from visits, of course?"

There were witnesses of the meeting. Malvina, wrapped in a fur, the white edges of which appeared from under deep black velvet, answered, also with a smile:

"Yes, we have made some visits."

But Irene, who was standing some steps lower, caught up the conversation with a vivacity unusual for her.

"We are coming just now from the shops, where we met the baron."

"What are your plans for the evening?" inquired Darvid again.

"We shall remain at home," answered Malvina.

"How is that?—but the party at Prince and Princess Zeno's!"

"We had no intention—" said Malvina, in an attempt at self-defence; but she saw the look of her husband, and the voice broke in her throat.

"You and your daughter will go to that party," said he, with a low whisper, which hissed from his lips. And immediately he added aloud, with a smile: "Ladies, I advise you to be at that party."

Malvina became almost as white as the fur which encircled her neck, and at that moment Irene asked:

"Will you be there, father?"

"I will run in for a while. As usual, I have no time."

## The Argonauts

"What a pity," said Baron Emil, "that I cannot offer you a part of mine as a gift. In this regard I am a regular Dives."

"And I a beggar! For this reason I must take farewell of you."

He raised his hat and had begun to descend when he heard Irene's voice behind him, calling:

"My father!"

She told her mother and the baron that she wished to exchange a few words with her father, and ran down the steps. The splendid entrance was empty and brightly lighted with lamps; but the liveried Swiss, at sight of the master of the house, stood with his hand on the latch of the glass door. At the foot of the stairs a tall young lady, in a black cloak lined with fur, very formal and very pale, began to speak French:

"Pardon me, that in a place so unfitting, I must tell you that the ball, of which you have spoken to Cara, cannot take place this winter."

Darvid, greatly astonished, inquired:

"Why?"

Irene's blue eyes glittered under the fantastic rim of her hat, as she answered:

"Because the very thought of that ball has disturbed mamma greatly."

After a moment of silence Darvid asked, slowly:

"Has your mother conceived a distaste for amusements?"

"Yes, father, and I need not enlighten you as to the cause of this feeling. There are people who cannot amuse themselves in certain positions."

"In certain positions? In what position is your mother?"

He made this inquiry in a voice betraying a fear which he could not conceal. This thought was sounding in his

## The Argonauts

head: "Can she know it?" But Irene said, in a voice almost husky:

"You and I both know her position well, father—but as to this ball——"

"This ball," interrupted Darvid, "is necessary to me for various reasons, and will take place in our house after a few weeks."

"Oh, my father," said Irene, with a nervous, dry laugh, "*je vous adresse ma sommation respectueuse*, that it should not take place! Mamma and I are greatly opposed to it; therefore, I have permitted myself to detain you for a moment, and say—" The smile disappeared entirely from her lips when she finished; "and say to you that this ball will not take place."

"What does this mean?" began Darvid; but suddenly he restrained himself.

The Swiss stood at the door; at the top of the stairs was another servant. So, raising his hat to his daughter, he finished the conversation in a language understandable to the servants:

"Pardon me; I have no time. I shall be late. We will finish this conversation another time."

When the carriage, whining on the snow, rolled along the crowded streets of the city, in the light of the street-lamps which fell on it, appeared Darvid's face, with an expression of terror. That pallid, thin face, with ruddy whiskers, and a collar of silvery fur, was visible for a moment with eyes widely open, with raised brows, with the words hanging on his lips: "She knows everything!—ghastly!" and after a while it sank again into the darkness which filled the carriage.

## CHAPTER VI

FOR the first time surely in that city, separated from England by lands and seas, a certain number of people, very limited, it is true, might admire small, bachelor's apartments, fitted up with tapestry, sculpture, and stained-glass, from the London factory of Morris, Faulkner, Marshall & Co. The drawing-room was not large, but there was in it absolutely nothing which had its origin elsewhere than in that factory founded by a famous poet and member of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The famous poet and artist, William Morris, had become a manufacturer for the purpose of correcting æsthetic taste in the multitude, and filling people's dwellings with works of pure beauty. The objects in this apartment were really beautiful. The tapestry on the walls represented a series of pictures taken from romances of knighthood, and from marvellous legends: Tristan and Isolde, on the deck of a ship; Flor and Blanche-flor, in a garden of roses; the monk Alberich, in a Dominican habit, descending into hell. The tapestry on the furniture was full of winged heads and fantastic flowers; on all sides were seen great art in weaving and masterly borders, which recalled the margins of old prayer-books. Dulled and dingy colors, producing the impression of things which had emerged from the mist of ages, and only glass window-screens, framed in columns and pointed arches, were brilliant with the colors of rubies, sapphires, and emeralds. The window-panes were stained with roses and with the figures of saints having pale profiles and wearing bright



## The Argonauts

robes. On one of the tables was a bronze pulpit in the form of a Gothic chapel; in another place was a lamp-support, which represented the Triumph of Death; Death was a woman with the wings of a bat; she was in a flowing robe; she had curved talons on her feet, and a scythe in her hand. This was a sculptured copy of Orcagna, from the Campo Santo of Pisa. In the middle of the dining-room, which was seen beyond an open door, stood a table, in the style of the eighteenth century. Altogether simple was this table, and like those under which, instead of carpets, men (of that century) used to put a layer of hay. The side table (fourteenth century), with painted carvings; a box (fourteenth century, a copy from the Museum of Cluny), with fantastic beasts carved on its cover, and with small figures on the front side, on very narrow niches, figures representing the twelve peers of France; another box, which was in the bedroom, was like this one, but the carving which covered it represented the anointing of Louis XI. at Rheims (Museum of Orleans). It stood at the feet of Brother Alberich, who, in his white habit, was entering the black jaws of hell; it took the place of a sofa, there being no sofa in the room. Both these boxes of wood and iron, immensely artistic, though merely copies of authentic relics, served as places in which to keep objects of art, and served as seats also. Besides these, there were only a few stools, with arms carved in trefoil shape (fourteenth and fifteenth century), and still fewer armchairs, immensely deep and wide—so-called cathedræ—covered with most wonderful stuffs; but everything was there which was needed, if the dwelling was to preserve a purely Middle Age character as to style. In the air, slightly colored by the brightly stained-glass, hovered something archaic and exotic—hoary antiquity reigned—and a critical spirit with the

## The Argonauts

odor of mysticism might be felt floating around there. But all this seemed quite comprehensible and natural to anyone who knew Baron Emil, the owner of that dwelling—a trained and exacting æsthete—moreover, the baron was of that school called Mediæval; and as a Mediævalist he professed homage for Middle Ages romances and legends; for subtle works of art and for inspirations touching a world beyond the present which resulted from them.

Three years before Maryan Darvid, in company with, or more strictly under, the protection of Kranitski, entered for the first time this dwelling, which had been recently furnished. The baron had brought home, from one of the Mediterranean islands, the mortal remains of his mother, who had died just before; he had received from her a great inheritance, and to put his interests in order he had settled in his native city for a period. Kranitski, long a friend in the house of his father and mother, had known him from childhood, and exhibited on greeting him an outburst of tenderness. This amused the baron, but pleased him also a little. “He is a trifle odd, good, poor devil—on the whole: gentle, perfectly presentable, and active.” Kranitski was very active. He went to the boundary to take out of the custom-house everything which had come to the baron’s address from England; and then helped him in the arrangement of the dwelling, which was attended with considerable labor. Upholsterers and other assistants lost their heads at sight of those knights, ladies, monks, peers of France, and the Triumph of Death, which came out of the boxes. Kranitski was astonished at nothing, for he had read much, and knew many things also, but he could not be very enthusiastic in this case. When the installation was accomplished, with his active and skilful assistance,

## The Argonauts

he thought: "The place is funereal, and there is little comfort here." He looked askance somewhat at the boxes with the peers of France and Louis XI. on them. The covers of these boxes, rough with carving, did not seem to him the most agreeable places to sit on. He said nothing, however, for he was ashamed to confess that he did not understand or did not favor that which was the flower of the newest exotic fashion. He visited the baron and spent many hours in his dwelling, and soon he took there a second man—a young friend of his. When Maryan Darvid found himself for the first time in the company and at the house of a Mediævalist, he was confused, like a man who is standing in the presence of something immensely above him. Almost ten years older, the baron surpassed Maryan immeasurably in all branches of knowledge, both of books and life; and his little dwelling was a marvel of originality and outlay. Maryan felt poor both in body and spirit. Though a yearly allowance of six thousand received from his father had not been enough up to that time, it seemed to him then a chip, only fit to be kicked away. As to the mental side, he was simply ashamed that he could still find any pleasant thing in that world which surrounded him, and in the life which he was leading. Commonness, cheapness, vulgarity! The meaning of these words he understood clearly after he had been in the baron's society. Even earlier he had begun to feel the need of something loftier; something beyond those pleasures of the senses—of fancy and of vanity—which he had experienced, though these were considerable. The substance and nature of these pleasures lay on the surface—they were accessible to a considerable number of people. The baron, in the manner usual with him, speaking somewhat through his nose and teeth, said:

## The Argonauts

“We, the experienced and disenchanted, seek for new shivers, just as alchemists of the Middle Ages sought for gold. We are in search of the rare and of the novel.”

In search of the rare and the novel in shivers, or universal impressions: sensuous, mental, and æsthetic, Maryan went once with the baron, and a second time alone, on a journey through Europe. He visited many countries and capitals. To investigate the Salvation Army, he joined its ranks for a period in England. In Germany he was connected with the almost legendary, politico-religious sect which bears the name *Fahrende Leute*; and, again, for some time, in an immense wagon drawn by gigantic *Mechlenburgers*, he wandered through the mountainous *Hartz* forest and along the banks of the picturesque *Saal*; he spent most time in Paris, where, with the theosophists he summoned up spirits, and with the decadents, otherwise known as incoherents, and still otherwise as the accursed poets; in the club of hashish-eaters he had dreams and visions brought on by using narcotics. Besides, he saw many other rare and peculiar things; but he was ever hampered by slender financial means and the need of incurring great debts; and was irritated by the impossibility of finding anything which could satisfy him permanently, or, at least, for a long period. He felt satisfactions, but brief ones. Everything of which he had dreamed seemed less after he had attained it—more common, weaker than in his imagining. The brightness was dimmed; on the glitter there were defects; the warm inspirations which came from afar, grew stiff when they were touched, stiffened, as oil does when floating on water. In the taste of things, sweetness and tartness became insipid and nauseous, the moment they reached his palate.

This was by no means a surfeit devoid of appetites; but,

## The Argonauts

on the contrary, such an immense flood of appetites that the insurgent wave of them struck the region of the impossible with fury, because it could not rush over that barrier. This was also an inflammation of the fancy, which had risen from an active mind, and which early and numerous experiences had turned into a festering wound. Finally, it was also the placing of self on some imagined summit, standing apart and aloft, beyond and above all. I—and the rabble. What is not I, and a handful like me—is the rabble. What is to be mine cannot be of the rabble; what is of the rabble must be not of mine. This pride was not of birth or money; it might be called nervous mental arrogance. Mental summits other than those of the rabble, and other requirements of the nerves; the highest bloom of human civilization—sickly, but the highest; the crash, but also the coronation of mankind. In all this there was a principle—one, but indestructible: the respect of individuality; the preservation of it from all limitations and changes which might come from outside; a respect reaching the height of worship. Everything might be, according to time and place, a painted pot; but individuality (that is, the way in which a man's wishes, tastes, way of thinking were fashioned) was sacred—the only sacred thing. It was not permitted to give this into captivity to anyone or anything, or to submit it to criticisms, or corrections. I am what I am; and I will remain myself. I will and I am obliged to know how to will—something like the superhuman preached by Friedrich Nietzsche.

The baron's dwelling was not only original and fabulously expensive, but it had in itself besides, that which the Germans define by the word *stimmung*. A number of young polyglots examined for a long time various languages of Europe to find a word which would answer best to the Ger-

## The Argonauts

man *stimmung*, till Maryan first, possessing the greatest linguistic capacity, came on the Polish expression *nastroj* (tone of mind). Yes, they agreed, universally, that the baron's dwelling produced a tone of mind; an impression not of what was in it, but of something of which it was the mysterious expression or symbol. It produced an impression which had its cause beyond this world. To believe in something beyond this world does not mean to profess a religion—as that of Buddha, Zoroaster, or Chrystos. No, of course not; that would be well for early ages and infantile people; old ones, too, run wild after fables, for the principle of the beautiful is in these fables; but they do not let fables lead them off by the nose. An impression from beyond the world is something entirely different; it is a shiver of delights which are unknown here, and only anticipated, coming from a world inaccessible to the senses. That such a world exists is shown by the enormous poverty of this one, and the mad monotony of those sources of pleasure which are contained in the world accessible to human senses. A poet is so far a poet, an æsthete so far an æsthete, as he is able, by intuition and unheard-of delicacy of nerves, to burst into the world above the senses and to experience the taste, or rather the odor, which goes before it. For it is an absolute condition that the feeling should be hazy, something in the nature of an odor; or, better still, the echo of an odor. No key of a musical instrument is to be touched; no definite features are to be drawn; the tone of mind alone is to be produced. The baron's dwelling gave the tone of mind for another world. He and his associates believed in another world, beyond the earth and the grave; on the basis of the poverty and commonness of the world before the grave—that is, in despair of the case. For them it was not subject



## The Argonauts

to doubt—that world, the slight odors of which flew to them in moments when they were in the tone of mind, was filled with perfect beauty, nothing but beauty; a beauty which, in this world, even by itself alone, raises men above the level of the rabble. If this beauty did not exist, we should be justified in accepting Hartmann's theory of the collective suicide of mankind, and in throwing a "bloody spittle of contempt" at life. A "bloody spittle," as is known from Arthur Rimbaud's sonnets on consonants, stands before the eyes of everyone who pronounces the vowel *i*, just as the vowel *a* brings up the picture of "black, shaggy flies, which buzz around terribly fetid objects."

"Ah, no, my friend! No, no! That passes my power! In heaven's name I beg you not to say another word!"

With this exclamation Arthur Kranitski, like a pike out of water, struggled in the immensely deep cathedra; and, with his arms in the air kept calling out:

"Terribly fetid objects! Bloody spittle! that is not poetry—it is not even decent! And those shaggy flies whirling around—that—No! I feel a nausea, which mounts to my throat. No, my friends, I will never agree that that is poetry!"

His voice broke, so wounded was he in his æsthetic conceptions. The young men laughed. That dear, honest Pan Kranitski is an innocent. In spite of his forty and some years clearly sounded, and his romantic experiences, his love for good eating and other nice things, the highest point of extravagance of all sorts for him were Boccaccio, Paul de Kock, Alfred Musset—simpletons, or babies.

Kranitski, after his first impression, had a feeling of shame.

"Pardon, my dears! An innocent! Not so much of an innocent as may seem to you. I am far from being an in-



## The Argonauts

nocent; I understand everything and am able to experience everything. But, do you see, there is a difference in tastes. Clearness, simplicity, harmony, these are what I like, but yours—yours——”

Again he was carried away by æsthetic indignation, so, throwing himself back in the chair, with outspread arms, he finished:

“Your making poetry of spittle and foul odor is—do you know what? it is sprinkling a cloaca with holy water! That is what it is.”

In the little drawing-room between the screens of stained glass and that part of the wall on which a knight of the Round Table was bowing to Isolde stood a small organ, and before the organ, at the midday hour, sat Baron Emil playing one of the grandest fugues of Sebastian Bach. Small and fragile, in his morning dress of yellowish flannel, in stockings with colored stripes, and shoes of yellow leather with very sharp tips, he was resting his shoulder against the arm of the chair carved in a trefoil (fourteenth century); he stretched his arms stiffly and rested his long bony fingers on various keys of the piano. His delicate, sallow features had an expression of great solemnity; his small, blue eyes looked dreamily into space, and from the glass shade, brightened by the sunlight falling in through the window, purple and blue rays fell on his faded forehead and ruddy, closely cut hair.

Besides the baron, who was playing, was present Kranitski, who had come an hour before and heard from the servant that the baron was sleeping yet. But that was not true, for a few minutes after Kranitski heard farther back in the building an outburst of female laughter, to which the nasal voice of the baron, who spoke rather long about something, gave answer. The guest smiled and whispered

## The Argonauts

to the "Triumph of Death," at which he was looking, "Lili Kerth."

Then he sank into the cathedra so that in spite of his lofty stature he almost disappeared in it. Soon the baron appeared at the door, and, accustomed to seeing Kranitski at various times, he nodded to him with a brief "*Bon jour!*" and turned to the organ. Sitting at the organ he threw these words over his arm:

"We expect Maryan at lunch."

"But she?" inquired Kranitski from the depth of the long and high arms of the cathedra.

"She will finish her toilet and go."

Then he played the Bach fugue. He played, and Kranitski, sank in the chair, listened and grew sadder and sadder. During recent days he had grown evidently old; he had become thin; wrinkles had appeared on his forehead. His person had lost elasticity and self-confidence. He looked like a man who had received a heavy blow, but he was, as always, dressed carefully, the odor of perfumes was around him, and a colored handkerchief appeared in his coat pocket. In presence of the baron's music he grew sad and then sadder. That music made the place more and more church-like. The figures of saints on the shade under the golden haloes seemed to melt in profound adoration. The "Triumph of Death" spread its wings on the background of subdued colors in the chamber; in that atmosphere the organ and silence sang a majestic duet. Kranitski began to feel the tone of mind mightily. His shoulders bent forward mechanically; he took out of his pocket the gold cigarette case, and thought, while turning it in his fingers:

"Everything passes! Everything is behind me—love and the rest! The grave swallows all things. The days

## The Argonauts

fly, like dust, fly into the past—into eternity! Eternity! the enigma.”

All at once into the duet, sung by the organ and silence, broke the loud rattle of a door, then the rustle of silk skirts, till there had shot through the dining-room, and halted in the door of the drawing-room, a creature who was pretty, not large, excessively noisy, and active of body. She had a short skirt, small feet, a fur-lined cape of the latest style, and a gigantic hat which shaded a small, dark, thin, wilted face, with eyes burning like candles and hair gleaming like Venetian gold. The silk, the sable, the incredibly long ostrich feathers, the diamonds in her ears, and the loud burst of laughter cut through the music of Bach like a silver saw.

“*Eh bien, ne veus-tu pas me dire bon jour, toi, grand bêtà? Tiens, voilà!*” (Well, wilt thou not say good-day to me, thou great beast? Here it is!) With the expression *voilà!* was heard a loud kiss, impressed on the cheek of the baron, then Lili Kerth, the gleaming of silk, diamonds, eyes, and hair turned toward the door of the antechamber and saw Kranitski.

“*Oh, te voilà aussi, vieux beau!*” (Oh, here thou art too, old beau!)

She sprang toward the cathedra, and, wringing her hands, exclaimed:

“What a funereal face!” And she spoke on, or rather babbled on in French: “Hast disappointments? That is bad! But one must not think of them. Do as I do. I have disappointments, but I mock at them. This is how I treat disappointments.”

She made a step so elastic that her little foot flew into the air, and she touched Kranitski’s chin with the point of her shoe. That was a model indication of the method with which one should treat disappointments.

## The Argonauts

“Now adieu to the company!” cried she, and rattling her bracelets she vanished.

In the chamber there was silence again, in the midst of which Tristan gave a knightly bow to Isolde, and the monk Alberich let himself down into the jaws of hell; “Triumph of Death” spread her bat-wings, and the saints with their golden haloes crossed their pale hands on their bright robes.

The baron was sitting before the organ with his head dropped to his breast. Kranitski, buried in the cathedra, panted aloud for some seconds till he said, with a complaining voice:

“It is abominable! I do not wish a *cocotte* to throw her foot on my neck when I am thinking of eternity. What confounded tastes you have! Immediately after leaving Lili Kerth to play that divine Bach. Nonsense! mixture! I am not a monk, far from it—but such shaking up in one bottle of the profane and the sacred, no, that is vileness swaddled in art. Yes, yes, I beg forgiveness once more, but in the Holy Scriptures something is said about a gold ring in a pig’s nose. *Voilà!*”

The baron smiled under his ruddy mustache and said, after a while:

“That is subtle and not to be understood by everyone. Bach after Lili Kerth—that is the bite, that is the irony of things. Do you know Baudelaire’s quatrain?”

He stood up, and, without declamation, even carelessly, through his nose and teeth, gave the quatrain:

“Quand chez le debauché l’aube blanche et vermeil,  
Entre en société de l’Idéal rongeur,  
Par l’opération d’un mystère vengeur,  
Dans la brute assoupie un Ange se réveille!”

With his hands in the pockets of his flannel sack he paced through the room.

## The Argonauts

Maryan had translated that quatrain quite beautifully. Without interrupting his pacing he repeated the translation.

The bell rang in the antechamber; Maryan entered the drawing-room. He was paler than usual and had dark lines under his eyes, which were very bright. Kranitski rushed from the cathedra, and, seizing the young man by both hands, looked into his face with tenderness:

“At last, at last! I have not seen you for almost a fortnight. I have not left the house. I had a little hope that you would visit me.”

“All right, all right!” answered Maryan, and touching the hand of the baron, he sat down on the box on which was the anointing of Louis XI., he rested his shoulders on the bare foot of Alberich and became motionless.

Maryan continued to be so motionless that not only the limbs of his body, but the features of his face seemed benumbed. Had it not been for his eyes, which were gleaming brightly, he might have been mistaken at a distance for a stuffed and elegantly dressed manikin. Baron Emil and Kranitski knew what this meant. According to Maryan that was a chill into which he fell always after disappointment or disenchantment. He was possessed at such times by a lack of will, which made all movements, even those which were physical, unendurable and difficult. At the same time he had such a contempt for all things on earth that it did not seem worth the while to him to move hand or lips for any cause. Some French writer has called such a condition of desiccation of the heart's interior. Maryan found that definition quite appropriate. When he sat motionless, deaf and dumb, or walked like an automaton moved by springs, he felt exactly as if the interior of his heart were drying up.

The baron, too, passed through similar states with some

## The Argonauts

differences, however, for feeling contempt instead of lack of will, he felt a "red anger," or what the French call *colère rouge*. He was carried away then by the wish to shut his fist, beat and break, in fact he did beat the servants sometimes, and break costly articles. He considered the desiccation of his friend's heart in its interior portions with respect, even with sympathy. He, with hands thrust into his yellowish flannel pockets, walked up and down in the chamber and hissed through his teeth:

"We are all stunted. We are breaking down! bah! it is time. The world is old. Children of an aged father born with internal cancer."

Kranitski, hearing this, thought: "Why should a man break down and get a cancer when he is young and rich?" But he did not oppose. He pitied Maryan. He looked at him with an expression of eyes similar to that with which loving nurses look on sick or capricious children.

At lunch Maryan's handsome face was sallow and motionless as a wax mask; as a wax mask it stood out on the background of the high arms of the chair. He was as silent as a stone. He had no appetite. He ate only a little caviar, and then fell to swallowing an endless number of small cups of black coffee, which the baron himself prepared, according to some special recipe, and poured out. The baron himself drank goblet after goblet of wine, and as to the rest he yawned a great deal more than he ate. But Kranitski's appetite was a success. After some weeks of Widow Clemens' meagre kitchen he ate eggs, cutlets, cheese, till his eyes were gleaming. According to his old acquaintances gastronomy had always been his weak point—and women. But he drank little and did not play cards. In spite of hearty eating he did not forget the duties of a welcome guest. He kept up conversation with the master of the

## The Argonauts

house, who told him carelessly of a rare and beautiful picture found at some collector's.

"A real, a genuine Overbeck. We were to examine it with Maryan, but since Maryan did not come—" He turned to young Darvid: "Why did you not come?"

There was no answer. The waxen mask, supported on the arm of the chair, remained motionless and gazed with gloomy eyes into space.

"Overbeck!" began Kranitski, and added, "a pre-Raphaelite."

Over Maryan's fixed features ran a quiver caused by better thoughts. Without the least movement of features or posture he grumbled:

"Nazarene."

Kranitski corrected himself hurriedly and with a shamed face.

"Yes, pardon! A Nazarene."

"But, naturally, a Nazarene pure blood," said the baron, growing animated, "the uninitiated confound Nazarenes with pre-Raphaelites quite erroneously. They form a separate school. This Overbeck is a find. I will say more, it is a discovery. If it were dragged out of that den and taken abroad one might do a splendid business with it."

Warmed by a considerable quantity of wine, his complexion made somewhat rosy, the baron fell to giving Kranitski an idea which had circled long in his brain: "There is in Poland a number of ancient families who are failing financially, and who possess many remnants of former wealth. There are frequently things of high value not only objects of pure art, but the most various products of former wealth and taste; as, for instance, hangings, tapestry belts, china, tapestry, furniture, and jewelry. The owners, pushed to the wall by evil circumstances, would sell will-



## The Argonauts

ingly, and for a trifle, articles which have great value now in both hemispheres. One must search for them, it is true, almost as the humanists once sought for Greek and Latin manuscripts, but whoever could find, purchase, and sell these would open a real mine of great profits. In Europe, England is the country most favorable for commercial operations of this kind, but the richest field is America. To buy here for a trifle and sell in the United States for gold weighed out to you. But, before beginning business, one should go to America, examine the field, form connections, take initial steps. Above all approach the undertaking with considerable capital and great knowledge."

While explaining his idea and the plan of operations which had come to his head long before, and drawing from the glass excellent liquid, the baron became animated, grew young, his little eyes under their ruddy brows gleamed sharply. And even Maryan said all at once in grumbling tones:

"It is an idea!"

"Is it not?" laughed the baron.

Kranitski listened in silence, with curiosity. Then, halting a little, he said, with some indecision:

"If your project becomes a fact then you will take me as your agent. I know a little of those things; I know where to look for them, and I offer you my earnest services—very earnest."

In spite of the jesting tone one could note in his imploring look, and in his smile full of timid, uncertain quivers, that he felt keenly the need of fixing himself to someone or something and escaping from the great void yawning under him.

All three lighted cigars and went to the drawing-room where Maryan sat again on the Louis XI. box, Kranitski

## The Argonauts

sank into a cathedra, and the baron opened at the window one sheet of an English paper, which shielded him before the light from his knees to the crown of his head. He was silent rather long, then from behind the paper curtain was heard his nasal voice:

“Crushing!”

“What?” inquired Kranitski.

“The fair at Chicago.”

And he read aloud an account of the preparations for the colossal exhibition which was to be in that American city. He accompanied the reading with judgments which contained comparisons: The old part of the world—the old civilizations, the old common methods and proceedings. Besides narrow spaces, familiar horizons—too familiar. But America was something not worn to rags yet. By a wonderful chance the baron had not been there, but when he thought of America Rimbaud’s verses occurred to him. He rose, and, walking through the chamber, gave the following:

“Divine vibration of green seas,  
The peace of fields spotted with animals;  
Silences traversed by worlds, by angels.”

“And by millions!” called Maryan from the foot of the white monk Alberich.

He took his shoulders from the monk’s robe, and added:

“Nowhere are there such colossal fortunes, and such powerful means of getting them, as on those fields spotted with animals.”

And all at once, as it were, the desiccating interior of his heart became animated, he rose and began to walk quickly through the chamber, passed the slowly walking baron, and said:

“It is an idea! One must dwell on it. I must go there,

## The Argonauts

or somewhere else—do something with myself. I am driven from this place by one of the greatest disappointments which I have ever known. I reached the bottom of disenchantments yesterday. That is why I did not come to look at the Overbeck. I was buried. My last painted pot burst. I was disappointed in a man for whom I had felt something like honor.”

He spoke English. The baron asked him in English also:

“What has happened?”

And Kranitski, with a little worse accent in the same language, repeated the question a number of times.

Maryan, continuing to walk through the chamber, narrated the conversation with his father and the ultimatum given him. The baron laughed noiselessly, and inquired; Kranitski gave out cries of indignation. Maryan, with a fiery face and feverish movement, added:

“I had thought that man worthy of my admiration. Logical, consequent, unconquerable, formed of one piece. A magnificent monolith. No sentiments, no prejudices. Permitting no one to disturb the development of his individuality. I understood that his method of rearing me, and then pushing me to the highest spheres of life, pointed to this, that I was to live for his honor. I was to be one of the columns of that temple which he had raised to his own glory. But just that absoluteness with which he used everything for his own purposes roused in me homage. The power of producing was in him equal to his power of egoism. So must it be with every individuality fashioned by nature not on a model, but originally. I did not know him much, and desired a nearer acquaintance. I was certain that we should understand each other perfectly; that I should behold from nearby a magnificent monolith. Meanwhile it

## The Argonauts

was stuck over with labels of various kinds of trash, and covered with half a hundred stains of the past——”

“He remembered the school of training and labor in time,” laughed Kranitski.

“Peste!” hissed the baron. “What a rheumatism of thought!”

“Moral principles!” added Kranitski, “he himself practises them beautifully. Let him give even half of his millions to that poverty which is ashamed to beg. Oh, he will not! He will not do that! By the help of moral principles it is easy to put sacred burdens on other men’s shoulders.”

“That is it,” added Maryan, “on other men’s shoulders you have hit the point, my old man. Yes! So many years he cared for nothing; he considered nothing; now on a sudden he has thrown down the edifice which he himself built. I know not as to others; but, as for me, I shall stick to my rights. I cannot permit myself to fall a victim to this sad accident, that my father is a mental rheumatic.”

He stopped, meditated a moment, then added:

“That is even more than rheumatism of thought; it is the exudation of a decaying past, filling the brain with the corruption—of a corpse.”

“Corruption of a corpse! very apt this expression!” exclaimed the baron.

Kranitski made a wry face in the cathedra, and muttered:

“No, no. What horror! I will never agree to that phrase.”

But no one heard this quiet protest. Now the baron in his turn, walking more and more quickly through the room, spoke on.

Maryan remained sitting on the Louis XI. box while the

## The Argonauts

baron walked and complained of the narrowness of relations and the low level of civilization in the city:

"This is the real fatherland of darned socks. Everything here has the mustiness of locked up store-houses. There is a lack of room and ventilation. In England William Morris, a great poet, establishes a factory for objects pertaining to art, and makes millions. I beg you to show anything similar in this place. Darvid has made a colossal fortune only because he was not blind, and did not hold on to his father's fence. Nationality and father-land, each is a darned sock—one of those labels which men with parti-colored clothes paste on a gate before which diggers are standing. One must escape from this position. One must know how to will."

The baron said, that as soon as he could bring certain plans of his to completion and regulate certain property interests, and even before regulating them, he would occupy himself with completing his new plan. He turned to Maryan:

"Will you be my partner? It would be difficult for me to get on without you. You have an excellent feeling for art—you are subtle——"

"Why not," answered Maryan. "But one should go first of all and examine the field; one should go to America before the exhibition."

"Naturally, before the exhibition, so as to begin action before it is over. In the question of capital——"

"I will sell my personal property, which has some value, and incur another debt," said Maryan, carelessly.

The baron halted; he thought awhile; his faded face took on that expression of roguery which the French call *polissonnerie*; joyousness seized him.

"We will shoot off!" cried he; and he made a movement

## The Argonauts

with his foot like that which a street-sweeper makes to catch a bark shoe thrown up in the air.

Maryan rose, shook himself out of his lethargy, and said, almost with delight:

“It is an idea. To America!”

Then from the abyss of the immensely deep and broad cathedra Kranitski's voice was heard, orphan-like, timid:

“But will you take me with you, my dears? When you shoot off you will take me with you, will you not?”

There was no answer. The baron was sitting already before the organ and had begun to play some grand church composition; in the dignified sound of that music Tristan made a knightly bow to Isolde, and the “Triumph of Death,” with its dark outline, was reflected on the background of Alberich's white habit, while the saints painted with golden haloes on the windows clasped their pale hands above their bright robes.

## CHAPTER VII

BARON EMIL said at times to Irene:

“You have the aristocracy of intellect. Your mind is original. There is in you much delicate irony. You are not deceived with painted pots.”

These words caused her pleasure of the same sort as that which the praise of a mountaineer causes an inexperienced traveller when he tells him that he knows how to climb neck-breaking summits. Much irony had flowed into her mind from certain mysterious sides of her life. But she had become conscious of this now for the first time, under the guidance and influence of the baron. He awed her by the originality of his language and ideas, by the absolute sincerity of his disbelief, and his egotism. During childhood she had seen a mask which astounded her, and struck her in the very heart. Thenceforth everything seemed better to her and more agreeable than masks. Moreover, the baron was to her thinking a finished æsthete, an excellent judge in the whole realm of art, and in this regard she did not deceive herself greatly. The opinions on art and philosophy, which he proclaimed, interested her through their novelty, and the expressions which he used purposely, though sometimes brutal and verging on the gutter, roused her curiosity by their singularity and insolence. She imitated him in speech; in his presence she guarded her lips lest they might let something escape through which she would earn the title of “shepherdess.”

“You are very far from the Arcadian condition, in which I meet people here at every step. You are intri-



## The Argonauts

cate; you are like an orchid, one stem of which has a flower in the form of a butterfly, while the next seems like a death's head."

She interrupted him with a brief laugh:

"A butterfly is flat."

Her laugh had a sharp sound, for the cold gleam of the baron's eyes fell on her boldly and persistently.

"No," contradicted he, "no; the combination of a death's head with a butterfly makes a dissonance. That bites and sticks a new pin in the soul."

"But the Greek harmony?" she inquired.

With a flattering smile, which conquered her, the baron answered:

"Never mention harmony. That is the milk with which babes were nourished. We subsist on something else. You like game, do you not? but only when it begins to decay. There is no good game, except that which is rank. Very well, we subsist on a world in decay. This is true, but you speak of that darned sock; namely, harmony—ha! ha! ha! You think sometimes one way and sometimes another. Your soul is full of bites! You are idyllic and also satirical. You jeer at idyls, and still, at odd times, you yearn for one somewhat. Have I touched the point accurately? Are my words true?"

"True," answered Irene, dropping her eyelids.

She dropped her lids because she was ashamed of the discovery which the baron had made in her, and for this cause as well, that she felt his breath on her face, and caught the odor of certain strange perfumes which came from him. His eyes sought hers and strove to pour into them their cold gleam, which was also a burning one. He strove to take her hand, but she withdrew it, and he, with lowered, drawling, and somewhat nasal tones, said:

## The Argonauts

“You wish, and again you do not wish; you feel the cry of life in you and try to turn it into a lyric song.”

The cry of life! Over this phrase Irene halted later on, but briefly, touched as she had been by premature knowledge, its meaning became clear to her straightway. The baron, small, fragile, with a faded face and irregular, was a master in calling forth the “cry of life” in women. His manner with them was exquisite, but also insolent. In his gray eyes, with the reddened edges of their lids, he had a look which was hypnotising in its persistence and cold fire. It resembled the glitter of steel—pale and penetrating. In the manner in which he held the hand of a woman and placed a kiss on it, in the glances with which he seemed to tear her away from her shelter, in the intonation given to certain words, was attained the primitiveness of desire and conquest under cover of polished refinement. Amid the tedium and dissatisfaction of ordinary and exercised love-makers this method seemed cynical, but bold and honest. It might have been compared to the shaggy head of a beast sticking out of a basket of heliotropes, which have ever the character of sameness as has their odor. The head is ugly, but smells of a cave and of troglodytes, which among common flowers of dull odor lend it the charm of power and originality.

Irene thought at once of “great grandfatherliness;” when in presence of the baron her nerves quivered like chords when touched in a manner unknown up to that time. She asked herself: “Am I in love?” But when he had gone this question called from her a brief, ironical smile. She analyzed and criticised the physical and moral personality of the baron with perfect coolness, and at moments with a shade of contempt even.

A vibrio! This expression contained the conception

## The Argonauts

of physical and moral withering, almost the palpable picture of an existence which merely quivers in space, and is barely capable of living. In comparison with this picture she had a presentiment of some wholesome, noble, splendid strength. Disgust for the baron began to flow around her heart and rise to her lips with a taste that was repulsive, and to her brain with a thought that was bitter: Why is this world as it is? Why is it not different? But perhaps it was different somewhere else, but not for her? She had ceased to believe in an idyl. She had looked too long, and from too near a point, at the tragedy and irony of things to preserve faith in idyls. Maybe there were idyls somewhere, but not in the sphere where she lived—they were not for her! To yearn for that which perhaps did not exist at all, which most assuredly did not exist for her! What a “rheumatism of thought” that would be! Her head, with a Japanese knot of fiery hair on the top of it, bent down low, for the stream of lead from her heart was rising. With a movement usual to her she clasped her long hands, and, squeezing them violently, thought:

“Well, what of it? I must in every case create some future, and why should any other be better than this one? Here at least is sincerity on both sides, and a just view of things.”

As time passed she said to herself that what she felt for the baron was love of a certain kind, and that at the foundation of things there is no other love, and if there is any other kind it does not signify much, for each kind passes quickly. She began in general to attach less and less weight to that side of life, and also life itself had for her a charm which was continually decreasing. In the gloom of weariness, and the apathy into which she was falling, that which connected her with the baron was like a red electric

## The Argonauts

lantern shining on a throng in the street and in the darkness. It was not the bright sun, nor the silvery moon; it was just that red lantern which, shining on a throng in the street, enabled one to see many curious or brilliant objects.

She knew of Lili Kerth, and the role which she played as to the world in general and the baron in particular. The baron in that case, as in others, wore no mask; sometimes he accompanied Lili Kerth to public promenades, and sometimes even showed himself with her in a box at the theatre. That was in contradiction with morals, especially in view of his relation with Irene; but subjection to morals, would not that be standing guard over graves, or the "darned sock?"

In this case Maryan, without knowing why, did not applaud his friend.

"*C'est crâne, mais trop cochon,*" judged he, and he pouted a little at the baron, but looked with curiosity at his sister, also present in the theatre. Irene sat in her box as usual, calm and full of distinction, a little formal, never charmed with anything, or laughing at anything. As usual she conversed with the baron between acts, till Maryan, looking at her, sneered, and asked:

"How did your vis-a-vis please you?"

"*Qui cette fille?*" asked Irene, carelessly. "The color of her hair is superb. Pure Venetian gold."

No feeling of offence, or modesty.

"Bravo!" said Maryan. And with comical solemnity in his voice he added: "Dear sister, you have a new mentality altogether. You have surpassed my expectations, and now I shall call you my true sister."

Why? Was she to be naïve in a theatre? She knew well that such things were done everywhere, and they must ex-

## The Argonauts

ist in the life of the baron. And, if they must exist, then let them be open, for mysteries—Oh! she preferred anything to masks and mysteries. Besides the question was mainly in this, that that history of the baron and the famous singer of chansonettes did not concern her in any way.

One evening outside the windows of the house began the twilight, which was rather pale from snow. In the drawing-room sat Irene amid the cold whiteness of sculpture, which adorned the walls, and the reflection on polished furniture of blue watered-silk. The young lady was seated at one of the windows on a high stool. On the background of the window-pane, filled with the whitish twilight, her figure seemed tall, with narrow shoulders, and her profile somewhat too prolonged. Over this profile rose a knot of fiery hair, and the whole figure reminded one of a statue of a priestess, erect and smiling enigmatically. Her eyelids were drooping, her long hands were clasped on her robe; but the smiles wandering over her lips and ever changing, were not those of satisfaction. She remembered that in recent days she had met the baron oftener than before. He strove more and more to see her—to meet her. He simply pursued her—found her frequently in shops which she visited with her mother, or alone. When he came he did not shield himself with the excuse of chance, but said with his usual sincerity:

“I willed to-day to see you, and I see you. I know how to will!”

This day she had barely entered the shop of a celebrated tailor when he entered also, and immediately, with unusual animation, began to tell her of his great project of going to America and settling there for a long time, perhaps permanently. He was roused by that idea; he was almost enthusiastic; the hope of new scenes and impressions, perhaps

## The Argonauts

great profits, had fired his imagination. Of these last he spoke also to Irene.

“One must move, rouse courage, bring the nerves into action, otherwise they may wither. One must conquer and win. He who does not gain victories deserves the grave. Money is an object worthy of conquest, for it opens the gates of life. William Morris is a famous poet and artist, but he became a manufacturer. He understood that contempt for industry is like many other things, a painted pot. Men made this pot and poets painted it in beautiful colors, then the poets died of hunger. America holds in reserve new horizons.”

He spoke long, and was astonished himself at his own enthusiasm.

“I thought,” said he, “that I should never know enthusiasm, and I supposed even that it was a rheumatism of thought. Meanwhile I feel enthusiasm, yes, enthusiasm! And it pervades me with a delightful shiver. Do you not share it? Are you not attracted, as well as I, by distant perspectives, new horizons, ‘the divine vibrations of blue seas, the silences traversed by worlds, by angels’—And plagiarizing he repeated the addition made by Maryan: ‘And by millions’?”

Yes, she was attracted. Not by the millions; she was too familiar with them, but the distant perspectives, the new horizons, the shoreless expanses of oceans, and the endless quiet of spaces which in the twinkle of an eye were unfolded before her imagination. The dull pain, and the gloomy disgust which tortured her not long before, cried out: “Yes! yes! go, fly far, as far as possible under new skies, among people of another nationality! Go, fly, seek.”

With a slight flush on her cheeks, which were delicate to the highest degree, she told all this to the baron, whose crumpled, faded face was gleaming with delight.

## The Argonauts

“You make me happy, really happy!” whispered he, and added: “Command me to bow down before you; I will obey and bow down.”

Meanwhile a door-bell was heard every moment in the great shop, and a wave of people passing by reminded Irene of the reason why she was there. She turned to an elegant apartment, in which a flood of materials disposed on the furniture was waiting for her. The baron had a knowledge of the wearing apparel of ladies; he liked to speak of it; and more than once, with the accuracy of a tailor, and the pleasure of an artist, he told of the original and peculiar toilets seen in capitals. On this occasion, in the tailor’s apartment between great mirrors, in the flood of unfolded materials, he said:

“I beg you not to dress according to pattern; I beg you not to spoil my delight by forcing me to see on you any of the ridiculous styles of this city. I meet no ladies here of subtle taste. There is wealth, frequently there is even taste, but common, according to pattern. For you it is necessary to think out something new—something symbolic, or rather something which symbolizes. A woman’s dress should be a symbol of her individuality. For you it is necessary to think out a dress which would symbolize aristocracy of soul and body.”

And he fell to thinking out; and they both fell to thinking out. They selected among colors and kinds of materials; they examined specimens, drawings, the baron corrected them, completed them with details taken from his own fancy. After a certain time they agreed to one thing: her dress should be *flame* color. With Irene’s delicate complexion and her fiery hair this would, as the baron thought, form a whole which would be irritating.

“In this robe you will be novel and irritating.”



## The Argonauts

The proprietor of the shop, elegant and important, came in and went out, inquired, advised, and again left them to their own thoughts and decisions. They, on their part, amused themselves better and better, surrounded by a light cloud of perfumes which rose from their clothing, and by the rustle of silks which fell to their feet, like cascades of many colors. The flame-colored material was selected, still they went on selecting. The baron, with a flush appearing on his cheeks, exclaimed:

“We are passing the time most delightfully, are we not? And who could have expected it? At a tailor’s! But you and I know how to experience sensations which no one else can experience. For that it is necessary to have a sixth sense. You and I have the sixth sense.”

Irene began to lose her usual formality and air of distinction; she spoke quickly and much; she laughed aloud, and, a number of times, the movement of her bosom and arms became irregular, too lively at moments, but they were full of a half dreamy gracefulness. The baron grew silent and looked at her for a while, then, with rapturous eyes, he began:

“How you are changed at this moment. How charmingly you are changed! Such surprises interest one—they irritate. You have the rare gift of causing surprises.”

With gleaming eyes he begged her insistently to tell him whether the change which had taken place, the humor into which she had fallen, was spontaneous or artificial, the result of feeling, or of coquetry.

“You are without doubt the product of high training, so it is difficult to know in you that which is nature and that which is art. And such a person in that changed form is problematical—I beg you, I beg you to tell me whether in you this is nature, or art?”

## The Argonauts

Listening to these words, in which a very insolent idea was contained, she laughed and turned her eyes away. But bending toward her with a smile which might remind one of a satyr, and with a request in his voice, he asked:

“Is this nature? is it art?”

With a sudden resolve she answered:

“It is nature!”

And she wished to equal the boldness of her answer with the boldness of her look, but a flaming blush shot over her face, and the lids covered her eyes, into which shame had gushed forth. Though maiden modesty was a painted pot, this new change, to which Irene had yielded, exercised on the baron a new irritating influence. In the midst of the rustling materials he seized both her hands, his eyes flashed magnetic rays into her flushed face; he drew her delicate form toward him. She tried to twist her hands away, and with a violent effort strove to throw her bust backward, but the fragile baron was very strong at that instant; he pressed her hands in his as in a vice, and whispered into her very face:

“Do not fight against that cry of life which is heard within you—I am a despot—I know how to will——”

With the last word he pressed his lips to hers. But that moment she, too, gained unexpected strength, and in a flash she was some steps away from him, very pale now and trembling throughout her whole body.

“This is too much of nature!” cried she.

Her head was erect, and from her eyes came flashing sparks, which soon melted, however, into cold irony. Shrugging her shoulders, with a smile she exclaimed:

“*Dieu! que c’était vulgaire!*”

Then holding her skirt with both hands, as if she wished not to take one atom of dust from that room with her, she

## The Argonauts

went out into the shop; the baron saw her talk to the tailor for a moment with her usual coolness, and then turn to go with the ordinary words of brief leave-taking.

But now Irene sitting there on that tall stool at the window, surrounded by the fading gleam of the blue watered-silk, and against the background of the pane which was covered with a whitish gloom, seemed a statue with a delicate bust, and a somewhat prolonged profile settled in stony fixedness. The "cry of life" possessed as words the charm of novelty and daring, but when changed into an act it roused in her every feeling of offence and maiden modesty. The shaggy beast had ventured out too far from behind the heliotropes, and had given forth too rank a smell of the den and the troglodytes. "It is vulgar!" cried she to the baron, but she understood immediately that what had taken place was neither new, nor a rare thing, but as old as the human race and as vulgar as the street is. The tailor's shop full of people, the ceaseless ringing at the door-bell, the noise of selling and buying, the passage beyond the window—is the street. A kiss received on the street. Street adventure! A quiver shot downward through her shoulders. Before her imagination passed the wretched forms of women frailing in the dusk of evening along the sidewalks. On her inclined face a blush came out; that painted pot called maiden modesty, under the form of inherited instinct and woman's pride, was laboring in her untiringly and painfully. After a while its place was taken by disgust beyond expression.

The baron, whose single charm was in his subtlety, appeared now as a vulgar figure. That kind of mutual love, which she had thought they felt for each other, when closely analyzed, reminded her of pictures in which Fauns

## The Argonauts

with goats' beards were chasing through the forest after Nymphs. On Irene's lips a jeering, almost angry smile, now fixed itself. What did he say: "a sixth sense." Why a sixth sense in this case? Empty words! The baron jeers at painted pots, but he makes them himself, and paints them in the ancient colors. An idyl is an old thing, and a den is old also, but the idyl would be better than the den if only it existed. But where is it? Her eyes had never seen an idyl, but they had seen, ah, they had seen what happens and takes place with loves of men and women, and with bonds which bear the name of sacred! Well, what is to be done with the baron—and America? Such contempt for everything, such disbelief in all things, such a contemptuous despising of everything, and of her own self as well, embraced her and possessed her, that at the end of the meditation she said to herself: "It is all one!" She crossed her hands and pressed them firmly across her breast, bent her head somewhat, and thought: "It is all, all, all one!"

A few tears, one after another, fell on her tightly clasped fingers. "All one! If only the sooner!"

What sooner? Why sooner? With a slow movement she turned her face toward her mother's apartments; her lips which quivered, and the glistening tear which had fallen on them had the same kind of expression that a child has when crying in silence. With brows raised somewhat, she whispered:

"Mamma!"

After a while, under those brows which were like delicate little flames, her eyes began to grow mild, to lose their tears and their irony, until they took on an expression of such delight, as if they were looking at an idyl.

Meanwhile the air, modified by the gray twilight, was

## The Argonauts

cut by a bright moving line. This was Cara going from her father's study with Puff tugging at her skirt. She hummed a song as she went forward. When she saw her sister she ceased humming, and called out from the end of the drawing-room:

"Do you know, Ira, father will dine with us to-day?"

In her voice a note of triumph was heard. After many weeks her father would sit for the first time with them at the family table, and then everything would go on as it should go. What it was that went ill, and why it went so, she knew not. But she had been observing, was astonished, and had fears. With that real sixth sense, which persons of keen sensitiveness possess, she felt something. She felt in the air a certain oppression, a certain trouble, and, not knowing what these signified, nor whence they were coming, she suffered. In the very same way, organisms with supersensitive nerves feel the approach of atmospheric storms. Now she advanced with a short step, erect and slender, with Puff at her skirt, while she hummed joyously.

When Irene entered her mother's study soon after, she saw, by the lamplight, a group composed of three persons. Sitting on the sofa, with glitters of black jet in her light hair, was Malvina Darvid; nearby, in a low armchair, inclining toward her, was Maryan, elegant as usual, and before him, with elbows resting on her mother's knees, knelt Cara, a bright, blue strip lying across the black silk robe of her mother.

"A picture deserving the eyes of Sarah and Rebecca!" suggested Irene, going straight to the mirror before which she began, with raised arms, to arrange and modify the knot of hair on her head. Maryan, in good humor, was imploring his mother to let him have her portrait painted by one of the most noted artists in the city.

## The Argonauts

“His brush is famous! I cannot understand how, amid the effeteness of this city, a talent can rise which is so fresh and individual. In his landscapes there is a magnificent *pleinair*, and as a portrait painter he knows how to seize the soul. My mother, let me have your soul enchanted into a portrait—have you noticed that the eyes of some portraits look on us from beyond this world? There is an enchanted soul in them. Let me have your portrait painted by an artist from whose canvas comes a breath from beyond this world.”

He inclined his cherub head and kissed his mother's hand, which was resting on Cara's shoulder.

“And kiss me, too!” cried Cara.

“Sentiment!” said Maryan, straightening himself, “beware of sentiment, little one. I, thy great-grandfather, say this to thee.”

“Splendidly expressed!” exclaimed Irene from the mirror. “Cara's soul is so primitive, yours——”

“So decadent,” put in Maryan.

“That you have a right to be called her great-grandfather.”

“I greet you great-grandmother!” laughed he at Irene. “I say this, mother, for, as you see, I understand my elder sister perfectly, but not the little one yet; however, that will come some time—surely soon. *Mais revenons à nos moutons*: How about the portrait?”

Malvina laughed. Her face, greatly troubled an hour before, had grown young again. A certain sunray had pierced the thick cloud at that moment. She warded off the idea of the portrait.

“Why? There are too many portraits of me already. Oh, too many!”

“Caricatures!” exclaimed Maryan, “and none of them

## The Argonauts

is mine. I beg a portrait for myself specially; my own exclusive property."

"What for?" repeated Malvina. "Look at the original as often as you like. Better not have a portrait; then, perhaps, you will feel the need of seeing me oftener."

"No reproaches, dear mother! Leave reproaches, threats; let the whole patriarchal arsenal remain on that side, over there——"

With a gesture he indicated the door leading to the interior of the house.

Cara raised her head from her mother's knees, and her eyes glittered.

"But on this side let there be only sweetness, only charm, only that precious, beautiful weakness, before which I am on my knees always. As to this, that I can see the original of the portrait when I wish, that is a question! We are grains of sand scattered over the world by the wind of interesting voyages."

"Have you some plan of a journey again?" inquired Malvina, alarmed.

"Yes. It is in indistinct lines yet, but is becoming more definite every day. This will be the step of a giant—fleeing before that rod with which the all-mighty father is pleased to beat his children."

Again, with a gesture he pointed to the door leading to the more distant apartments, and in the short laugh which accompanied his last words there was sarcasm—almost hatred. At the same moment he met Cara's eyes, and asked:

"Why look at me, little one, in that way? There are eyes! curious, anxious, and as frightened as those of a hunted deer. Why so curious? What do you fear?"

Cara hid her face in her mother's dress, quickly.



## The Argonauts

"But how would it please you, mamma, to make a trip with me to America?" called Irene from before the mirror.

She put up the last of her hair, fastened it with a fantastic pin, and said, turning toward her mother:

"I have such Tom Thumb boots that when I put them on I shall be beyond the sea with three great steps. How does that plan please you?"

"You give a shower of plans to-day," jested Malvina. "A portrait, flight from the rod, America."

"A ball!" exclaimed Cara, raising her head. "Do you know of it, Maryan? In a few weeks we shall have a real ball—a grand one."

"Your tale is curious, little one, tell on," answered Maryan. "When talk is the question, there is never need to beg Cara twice."

She sprang up from her knees and told of the hour which she had spent in her father's study a few days before. She had told her mother and sister of the plan of the ball, but how it rose she had not told. Something had prevented. Now she would tell them all. Three gentlemen had visited her father: Prince Zeno, Count Charski, and a third person whose name she did not remember, but he was a large man, tall and broad; his breast glittered with stars and crosses. She, Cara, wished to hide from the guests behind the book-shelves—there were shelves behind which she sat often, invisible herself, she saw and heard everything. It was a wonderfully comfortable hiding-place, in which her only trouble was Puff; for, when anyone came to the study he wanted to bark, but she squeezed his nose with her hand tightly, and he was silent. That day she did not go behind the book-shelves, for her father commanded her to sit in the armchair. So she sat there with dignity.

Now she sat on the stool, and showed them in what a

## The Argonauts

posture she had sat in presence of her father's guests, her hands on her knees, bolt upright, with dignity on her rosy face. Puffie alone interrupted this dignity, she said; he crawled up behind her, put his paws on her shoulder, and touched her with his moist nose. One of the gentlemen turned then to her, and said:

"You have a beautiful dog, young lady."

"He is very nice," answered she.

"And what is his name?" asked the man.

"Puffie," explained she.

She did not laugh, for there was no cause. Puffie was really very nice, and he had a good name, but those gentlemen, while looking at her, smiled very agreeably, and one of them said to her father:

"How time passes! Not long ago I saw your younger daughter a little child, and now——"

The other interrupted: "She is almost grown. And as tall it seems as her elder sister."

"We have only very rarely the pleasure of seeing your family in society this winter," said the other.

"Your wife and daughter pass a very secluded life this year," said the second visitor.

"My wife complains of frequent neuralgia," answered father, and then the unknown, large man talked.

Hitherto Cara, while giving the conversation of the two gentlemen, changed her voice, imitating the tones, and posture of each; now she repeated the words of the large man in the rudest voice that she could command:

"I have not yet had the honor of being presented to your wife and elder daughter, but I have heard so much, etc."

Then they talked longer with her father about something else, and when going away gave her some nice com-

## The Argonauts

pliments. She courtesied. She might say with confidence that she had played the rôle of a mature young lady brilliantly. Her father said, after the departure of the guests, that he was glad to receive the large man's visit. The large man might aid him greatly. Then he thought a while, and said:

"Do you know what, little one, you must show yourself in society."

Here Maryan muttered in an undertone: "He needs a new column in his temple."

Irene smiled. Malvina feigned not to hear; Cara, given up to her twittering, twittered on:

"Then father said that mamma and Ira were leading almost the life of a cloister, that they received few persons, and went out little. That had the appearance of domestic misfortune, or of bankruptcy. Such an appearance was ugly in general, and harmful to business. To avoid this there was need to arrange a reception, but grand, and as splendid as possible. The carnival would be over soon, and at the end of the carnival we would give a ball in which the 'little one' would appear in society for the first time. To-day, an hour ago, father said he would come to us at dinner, and would talk at length about this ball with mamma."

Here Cara finished the narrative which was somewhat of a dramatic representation. Maryan rose suddenly from his seat.

"I must go," said he, standing rigidly, and with a serious face.

"Stay, Maryan," said Malvina, in a low voice.

On her face was a look of pain; a deep wrinkle appeared on her forehead; her voice was imploring. Maryan looked at her, hesitated a while, then dropping into an armchair with the movement of an automaton, muttered:

## The Argonauts

“Let thy will be done! Let a pot be painted with the color of a son’s love—for you, mother.”

From the thought that he must meet his father soon, the interior of his heart began to desiccate.

A servant announced the dinner. Cara sprang up from the stool:

“I will go to conduct father!”

She went to the door, but turned back from it, and, dropping on her knees before her mother, put a number of long, passionate kisses on her knees and her hand. Then hanging on her neck, she whispered in a low voice:

“Golden, only, dearest mamma.” And springing from her knees she flew out of the room like a bird.

What did that violent outburst of tenderness for her mother mean? No one knew, neither did she herself, perhaps. Was it a prayer for someone, or the assurance that she loved greatly not only that one, but her mother too? or was it delight that at last she would see them both together? She flew like a bird through the drawing-rooms, lighted by lamps burning here and there, till she pushed quietly into her father’s study, and put her hand under his arm at the writing-desk. All rosy, imitating the deep and solemn voice of the servant, she said:

“Dinner is served!”

Darvid felt a stream of warmth and sweetness flowing to his breast.

“Oh, you rogue!” said he, “you sunray! You little one!”

When he was entering the dining-room soon after with Cara, Maryan led in his mother through the opposite door; she was all in black silk and jet.

Darvid inclined and touched his wife’s hand with his lips; on Malvina’s face there was a pleasant smile.

## The Argonauts

"I am so immensely occupied," said he, "that I have not time every day to inquire after your health."

"I thank you, my health is excellent."

At a rich side-table two servants were occupied; at the table gleaming with crystal and silver stood Miss Mary, graceful and still young, with puritanic simplicity in her closely fitting garment, and with smooth hair over her calm forehead. The master of the house greeted her and expressed his regret that, because of business, he could see her only rarely. When all were seated at table, Malvina, with the experience of a trained lady of the house, began conversation:

"We have been talking just now of the United States, with which Ira and Maryan have begun to be greatly interested."

"No doubt because of the exhibition at Chicago," said Darvid; "it must be something colossal indeed."

Miss Mary mentioned the congress of women which was to meet there. Malvina and Irene supplemented that statement with details; the conversation flowed on smoothly, easily, coolly; it was filled with various kinds of information. Maryan took no part in it. He sat stiff, deaf, dumb, with fixed features. When he ate, his movements had the appearance of an automaton, even his eyelids winked very rarely. He was a picture of apathy, contempt, and biliousness. Even his fair complexion had grown sallow, and his lips had paled. He caused exactly the impression of a wax doll in an elegant dress, with glittering eyes.

Darvid, with some humor and playfully, spoke of the edifice which was to be erected in Chicago according to a plan by a female architect.

"I tremble for those who are to visit the building. In architecture, equilibrium has immense meaning, and

## The Argonauts

for women equilibrium is most difficult. Women lose equilibrium so easily, so generally, so inevitably, almost."

This was said in a manner quite airy and trifling; still—it was unknown why—in the voice of the speaker certain biting tones quivered, and a pale flush came out on Malvina's forehead. Irene fell at once to talking most vivaciously with Miss Mary about the latest movement among English women toward emancipation, and Darvid himself, with some haste, expressed quietly, though with some irony, opinions touching these movements.

A great bronze lamp cast abundant light on the table, which was covered with the brightness of silver and crystal. White-gloved servants, as silent as apparitions, changed the plates adorned with painted and gilded monograms; with bottles in their hands they inquired about the kind of wine which they were to pour out; they served dishes from which came the excellent odor of truffles, pickles, rare meat, and vegetables. A number of wall-lamps, placed high, lighted the sides of the dining-hall, which was decked with pictures in brightly shining frames, and with festoons of heavy curtains at the doors and windows. When it left America, the conversation, carried on in French and English, turned to European capitals and to the various phenomena of life in them. English was spoken out of regard for Miss Mary, but French sometimes, for Darvid and his wife preferred that language to English. Irene and Cara might have been considered as genuine English. The ready and accurate English; the pure Parisian French; the varied information, in an atmosphere of light falling from above on a table glittering with costly plate; the order and the dignified ornaments of the great hall; the grand scale of living seemed undoubted *high life*. There was a moment in which Darvid

## The Argonauts

cast his glance around and threw back his head somewhat; his forehead freed itself from wrinkles—smooth, clever, shining somewhat at the temples—it seemed to be carved out of ivory. His nostrils, delicate and nervous, expanded and contracted, as if inhaling, with the odor of wines and delicacies, the more subtle and intoxicating odor of his own greatness. But this lasted only a short time; soon certain pebbles of seriousness and breaths of distraction began to interrupt his conversation and to dull his clear thought. Balancing in two fingers a dessert knife, he said to Miss Mary:

“I respect your countrymen greatly for their practical sense and sound reason. That’s a people—that’s a people——”

He stammered somewhat now—a thing which, in his low and fluent speech, never happened. He was thinking of something else.

“That is the nation which said to itself: ‘Time is money,’ which also——”

Again he faltered. His eyes, attracted by an invincible power, turned continually toward that point of the table where black jets glittered richly and gloomily, and then his lips finished the judgment which he had begun:

“Which also possesses to-day the greatest money-power.”

Here Maryan spoke for the first time:

“Not only money; England now leads the newest tendencies in art.”

This was spoken at the edges of his lips, without co-operation of other parts of his face, which continued fixed; and on Darvid’s lips appeared his smile, of which people said that it bristled with pins.

“The newest tendencies of art!” repeated he, and the words hissed in his mouth somewhat. “Art is something



## The Argonauts

splendid, but the pity is that it is turned into a plaything by wrongly reared children!"

Maryan raised at his father a look from which a whole flood of irony rushed forth, and answered, with the edge of his lips:

"He alone is not a child who knows that we are all children, turning everything into playthings for ourselves. The point is that there are various playthings."

"Maryan!" whispered Malvina, with an alarm which she could not suppress.

Darvid turned his face to her suddenly, and their glances which till then had avoided each other carefully, met for a few seconds; but during that time Darvid's eyes filled with the glitter of keen steel, and Malvina bent her face so low over the plate that, in the sharp light, one could see only her forehead, with its one deep wrinkle. But that same moment Irene began to converse with her father about London, where he had spent a considerable time on two occasions. He answered her at once; spoke long, fluently, and interestingly, engaging also in the conversation Miss Mary, to whom he turned frequently and with pleasure.

Again the conversation went on smoothly, easily, deliberately. Above the table, in place of the odors of meats and sauces, hovered the light odors of fruit and vanilla. When the dessert was served, Darvid spoke of fruits peculiar to various climates which he had visited in his almost ceaseless journeys; all at once he stopped the conversation in mid-career, and turned to Cara, who struggled a few times with a dry and stubborn cough.

"I thought that you had recovered entirely. But you are coughing yet. That is sad!"

On the girl's face, which was flushing in a fiery manner,

## The Argonauts

there was an expression of sorrow or anger. Quickly and broken came the words from her lips which were pouting like those of an angry child:

"There are so many sad things in the world, father, that my cough is a bit of dust compared with them."

This was an answer thoroughly unexpected, but the impression which it might have made was hindered at once by Irene through a laugh and an exclamation too loud, perhaps:

"See where pessimism is going to fix itself! Is Puffie sick?"

"Cara's remark is precocious but pointed," said Maryan, with the edges of his lips.

Malvina, too, began to speak. Giving a small cup to her son, she inquired:

"You like black coffee so well that I ought to reserve another cup, ought I not?"

Maryan made no answer; with a wrinkle on her forehead, and a smile on her lips, she continued quickly and hurriedly:

"I share your taste for coffee, Maryan. Some time ago I drank much coffee, but I saw that it injured my nerves and deprived me of sleep. It is very disagreeable not to sleep, and better to give up a favorite luxury than suffer from insomnia."

Smiling and moving her head she talked, and talked on with great charm, and with a sweetness which always filled the tones of her voice. She mentioned mere nothings, connecting opinion with opinion, just to talk, to kill time, or avoid other topics. Darvid raised his head somewhat and looked at her through the glasses with which he had shaded his eyes until she bent her head before the gleam in those glasses, and her face sank very low over the cup, and was covered with an expression not to be hidden by a woman who

## The Argonauts

wants to vanish through the earth, dissolve in air, become a shade, become dust, become a corpse; if she can only escape from where she is and from being what she is. Then Irene, with a light tap, dropping her cup on the saucer, began:

"You must know well, father, how they make coffee in the Orient?"

He knew, for he had been in the Orient; and, in a way which was picturesque enough, he told about the Turks; how, sitting around in a circle, they put the favorite drink into their mouths slowly.

"They delight themselves with it, as dignified as Magi, and silent as fish. The time in which they give themselves to this absolute rest, composed of black coffee and silence, bears with them the name 'keif.'"

This word called laughter to the lips of all. Darvid laughed, too. On all faces weariness grew evident. Cara's thin voice called out:

"The Turks do well to be silent, for what good is there in people's talk? What good is there?"

"Here is a little sage, she is never satisfied with questions," said Darvid, jestingly.

"Capacity for criticism is a family trait of ours," laughed Irene.

"Cara had been distinguished by curiosity from childhood," added Malvina, with a smile.

Even Maryan, looking at his younger sister, said:

"The time always comes when children begin to speak instead of prattling."

Miss Mary, with an anxious forehead under her puritan hair, said nothing.

On the faces of all who spoke, anxiety was evident, and above the smiling lips weariness was present in every eye.

Malvina rose from her chair; Darvid left his place, bowed

## The Argonauts

to all with exquisite politeness, and, advancing some steps, gave his arm to his wife.

They passed through a small, brightly lighted drawing-room and halted in the following chamber, where the walls were adorned with white garlands and the curtains and upholstering were of blue watered-silk. Beyond, in a small drawing-room, Miss Mary sat down to play chess with Maryan; Cara took her place near them in the character of observer, and Irene unrolled in the lamp-light a piece of church stuff, very old and time-worn, which the baron had brought her as a rarity, and which she intended to repair by embroidering it with silk and gold thread.

Darvid and Malvina stopped among the pieces of blue furniture in the tempered light of a shade-covered lamp. Malvina was very pale, and her heart must have beaten with violence, for her breath was hurried. At last that had come which she had waited for long and vainly: a positive and decisive conversation.

With all her strength she desired an explanation, a change of some kind, and in any shape, if it would only bring a change in her position. She was waiting, ready to yield to everything, to endure everything, if he would only speak. He spoke, and said:

“To-morrow I shall go to a hunt on the estate of Prince Zeno, and as I go from there to a place where I have business, I shall return in ten days, more or less. Immediately after my return, and during the last week of the Carnival, there will be in our house a reception, a ball simply, the most brilliant possible. My business requires it, and public opinion concerning this family requires it also. I wish, too, that Cara should make her first appearance in society at that ball. I have drawn up, and will send you a list of persons to whom it is necessary to send invitations, per-

## The Argonauts

sons of whom you might not have thought; the rest of society you know better than I do. I know that you can arrange such matters excellently, and I trust that this time you will do all that is best. The check-book will be brought you by my secretary, whose abilities and time you may use without limit, as well as the check-book. There is no need to hesitate at outlay; everything should be in a style rarely seen in any house, or rather in a style never seen except in this house. This ball is needed for my business and for—public opinion concerning our family, which opinion is a little, even more than a little, lowered.”

He spoke slowly and politely, with an accent of command at the basis of the politeness. At the last words he cast into her face a gleam of his eyes which was firm and penetrating, then he bowed, and made a move to go.

“Aloysius!” cried Malvina, with tightly clasped hands, and she began to tremble. How was this? A ball, and nothing more! The question with her was of things as important as human dignity, conscience, unendurable restraint, and fear in the presence of her children.

He stopped and inquired:

“What is your command?”

She bowed her head and began:

“I require; I wish to speak with you at length and positively.”

He smiled.

“For what purpose? We have nothing pleasant to say to each other, and unpleasant conversation injures the nerves more than—black coffee.”

She raised her head, and with an effort, to which she brought herself with difficulty, said:

“Things cannot remain as they are. My position——”

## The Argonauts

With an expression of profoundest astonishment on his face, he interrupted:

“Your position! But your position is brilliant!”

He made a gesture which seemed to indicate everything which was in that drawing-room, and in the whole house; but she blushed deeply, and like one in whom the sensitive place is touched, exclaimed:

“But this is just what—what I do not wish any longer. I have the right to desire to be free, to withdraw, to cast from myself this glitter, and go somewhere.”

With all her strength she struggled against the tears which were overpowering her. He repeated with the profoundest astonishment:

“You do not wish? You have the right?”

Everything in him—cheeks, wrinkles on his forehead, pale lips—trembled with excitement now beyond restraint. But he was master of his voice yet. He spoke in low tones, but with a hiss:

“What right? You have no right! You have lost every right! You do not wish? You have no right to wish, or not to wish. You must live as it happens you, and as is needed. As to conversations and serious theatrical scenes, I want none of them—I, who have not lost the right to wish. I am silent, and I will enforce silence. That is, and will always be, our *modus vivendi*, which, moreover, should be for you the easiest thing in the world to preserve. You have everything: a high position, luxury, brilliancy, even the love of your children as it seems. You have everything except—except——”

He hesitated. His habit of preserving in all cases correctness of form, struggled with the excitement which had overcome him, and these words hissed through his lips in a low though envenomed voice:

## The Argonauts

“Except—the lover whom you have dismissed, on which deed I congratulate you, and—my respect, which you have lost, but without which you must live on to the end. On this subject we are talking now for the first and last time. We are talking too long. I am in a hurry to my work. I wish you good-night.”

The bow which he made before his wife might seem from a distance full of friendly kindness; he withdrew with perfect calmness and freedom of manner, still Irene went to her mother with a firm though hurried step, and with the piece of ancient stuff in her hand, she said:

“I am sure that without your assistance I shall not be equal to my task. To restore this Middle Age wonder requires taste, an eye, shading of colors; all this is beyond my poor ability.”

She stood before her mother, and among the large flowers on the cloth, which was changing from silver to sapphire, she indicated certain defects produced by time. Her eyelids blinked with marvellous quickness, and therefore, perhaps, she did not notice her mother’s chalky pallor, trembling hands, and despairing expression of eyes. Apparently noticing nothing she spoke in a loud voice and joyously:

“You have an ocean of various silks left after so many things which we made in company. Let us search among them. Shall we go? They are in your chamber. Come, mamma! I am so impatient to begin the restoration of this beautiful ruin! You will help me to match the silks, will you not? Oh, how many beautiful things you and I have made together with these four hands of ours, which were always in company.”

And they were in company then. She thrust her hand under her mother’s arm, and holding the strip of silver and azure stuff she escorted the very pale woman in black jets



## The Argonauts

through the brilliantly lighted drawing-room, past the chess-table at which were sitting three persons, through the dining-hall, where servants were hurrying, through her mother's study, in which both had passed most hours of their life, till she came to Malvina's bedroom, where, amid the yellow damask furniture a shaded lamp was burning. In the twinkle of an eye Irene drew the brass door-bolt, and with face turned toward her mother, with cheeks which flushed immediately, she took Malvina's two hands in her own.

"Enough of these secrets, of things partly said, and of barriers raised between our hearts and lips."

This hurried whisper burst from her like a current from a covered vessel filled with heat and opened suddenly.

"Let us tell each other everything—or no, say no word, I know everything and neither will I speak—but let us counsel—let us meditate together—Oh, mamma!"

Her form, usually erect and distinguished, bent, and trembled like a reed, and her lips, famous for irony and coldness, scattered a shower of kisses on the hands and face of her mother, whose chalky paleness was covered by a flame of blushes.

"Ira!" she exclaimed, "forgive. May God forgive me."

Unable to utter more than these words she dropped on her knees and touched the yellow cushion of the low sofa with her head. She seemed shattered, annihilated. Then Irene grew cold again. Sober thought and strong will shone in her eyes. She bent over her mother, placed her delicate hand on her shoulder, and began almost with the movement of a guardian:

"Mamma, I beg you not to despair, and above all not to torture yourself with that which you consider a reproach and a sin. Never say to your children 'forgive,' for we

## The Argonauts

cannot be your judges—I, least of all. You have ever been kind to us and as loving as an angel; we have lived with you; we love you—I most of all. Remember at all times that a loyal heart is near you and—a kindred one—for it is the heart of a daughter. You must stand erect, have will, think out something, frame something, have decision, save yourself.”

Looking into her mother’s face with a strange smile, she added:

“And save me, perhaps, for I, too, am a poor, unwise creature; I know not myself what to do.”

Malvina raised her head, straightened herself, and rose from her knees slowly.

“True,” whispered she. “You—you, so long and so earnestly have I wished to speak—of you—and had not the courage.”

“Well, let us speak now,” said Irene.

And again putting her hand under her mother’s arm, she led her to the ottoman, which stood in the tempered lamp-light.

“The door is bolted, no one can disturb us; we will have a talk, a long one. Only we must be reasonable, calm. Look at things and ourselves clearly; know definitely what we want; try to bring our plans into action; know how to wish.”

At these last words she imitated the nasal voice of Baron Emil, laughed at it, and dropped down on the carpet before Malvina had seated herself on the low ottoman. Irene, taking her mother’s hands in her own, fixed her eyes on her eyes, and began:

“Mamma, if you wish I shall become very soon the wife of the famous Mediævalist, Baron Emil, and we shall all three of us go to America—beyond the seas——”

## The Argonauts

"Oh, no! no! no!" exclaimed Malvina, who bent toward her daughter, and put her arms around the young woman with such terror as if she were shielding her from a falling house. "Not that! Not that! Something different—entirely different."

At that moment some impulsive, or impatient, hand shook the door-latch.

"Not permitted!" cried Irene, and she asked: "Who is there?"

There was no answer, but the latch moved again, though in a timid, and, as it were, imploring manner.

"You cannot come in," repeated Irene.

There was a rustle against the sofa outside, a light and quick step moved away.

"Cara!" whispered Malvina.

"For her as well as for ourselves there is need to end this position at the earliest," said Irene, with a sudden frown.

It was Cara; she had left the door of her mother's room with drooping head, with a great frown on her forehead, and no thought for the little dog, tugging at her skirt as usual. Half an hour before, when Maryan and Miss Mary had risen from chess, she rose, too, pushed her hand under her brother's arm and said:

"I have something to say to you."

Her seriousness was so evident that Maryan answered, with a smile:

"If your speech is to be as solemn as your face is we shall have little joy. What have you to tell me?"

Without answering she led him through the blue drawing-room to the next one more faintly lighted. Here she halted, looked around, and, seeing only inanimate objects, asked:

"Why have you quarrelled with father?"

## The Argonauts

This question in her mouth astonished him, and he asked in turn:

“Why do you wish this information? You might dream of the rôle of peacemaker.”

Without a shade of laughter, with forehead somewhat wrinkled beneath bright curls of hair, she repeated the question:

“Why have you quarrelled with father? Do you not love him? Why can you not love him? For me, father is an ideal! He is so wise, noble, great. When he was so long away I dreamed about him, wanted his return, imagined how happy we should all be when he came. But that is not the case in any way. All in the house seem to be at variance, angry, disappointed—I see this well, but I cannot understand why. Why? why is it?”

Maryan fixed his eyes on her attentively and laughed, but his laugh was not sincere, it was forced.

“Curiosity,” said he, “is the first step toward hell, and the surest road to premature age. You will grow old before your time, little one.”

“This is not curiosity!” interrupted Cara. “There is some kind of trouble here, I know not what it is; but something so unpleasant and—dreadful. Sometimes it seems to me that someone will die, or that something will vanish, and that, in general, something awfully bad will happen to somebody—I—know not what it is, but it is very bad. I know not what it is, but it is something—it is something——”

Maryan frowned and interrupted her:

“Since you know not what it is, nor to whom it will happen, nor how, what do you ask me for? Am I a master of the cabala, to interpret childish dreams for you?”

“This is not a dream; it is something of the sort that wanders in the air, touches, breathes, goes away and comes

## The Argonauts

again, like a haze—or the wind. You are grown up, and all say that you are clever. I beg you to explain this—I think, too, that, if you wished, you might so arrange matters that all would go better. It is your duty to do this. Do you not love mamma, father, Ira? I love them immensely—I would give up everything for them. I do not understand even how any person could live without loving somebody with full heart, and all strength—I could not. But what use—I am not grown up, not wise, I cannot even understand anything. With you it is different, but you have quarrelled with father. You do not even love him, I see that well. For what reason? Why? My brother, you might, at least, tell me something to explain.”

She stopped, and he stared at her, a look of indecision increased on his face. Something of concern, and a trifle of tenderness gleamed in his eyes. It might have seemed for some seconds that he would put his arm around her, or stroke her with his palm and smooth away the wrinkles from her childish forehead. But—“Arcadian” feelings were in the past, so he began to speak coldly and deliberately:

“My dear, you are torturing your little head for nothing with affairs of this world; you are not equal to them yet. I cannot tell anything to you, or explain anything, for you and I are at the two opposite poles of thought. You speak of devotion, duty, and love, like a governess, for you have a governess yet. As to my disagreement with father, you know nothing of what caused it; but, to be a kindly brother, I will answer a few words. Two developed and energetic individualities have met in this case and come into collision, like two planets. Two egotisms also—do not show such frightened eyes. Stupid nurses frighten children with a beggar, a gypsy, or an egotist, but mature

## The Argonauts

people know that egotism is a universal right; and, moreover, good business. Be an egotist. Take no trouble about what does not concern your own self and strive to develop your own individuality. Keep this in view, play joyously with Puffie, and go to sleep early, for long watching spoils the complexion of young ladies. Begin to think to-morrow of the dress which you will wear at that brilliant ball—planned by our father to torment mamma—and you will have success. Do not mind those mists, dreams, and other visions which come and go. They are conditions of mind which are very much subject to fancy, and other painted pots. This is all that I, your great-grandfather, can tell you, or mention as advice. Look at Ira and imitate her wisdom, which knows how to make sport of the world around her. Good-night to you, little one!”

He pressed her hand in such a friendly manner that he hurt it, and then went away, disappearing at the other end of the chamber.

Cara stood for a time with her eyes fixed on the floor, then she raised her head and looked around at the void in which silence had fixed itself. The globe-lamps burning, here and there, at the walls, filled the drawing-room with a hazy, half-light, in which, here and there, glittered golden reflections, and the features of faces, and landscapes flimmered on pictures. Farther on, from the shady corner of the other drawing-room, slender and swelling vases appeared, partially; portions of white garlands on the walls; the delicate dimness of dulled colors on Gobelin tapestry. Farther still, in the small warm and bright drawing-room, lights were burning in the candelabra, and a crown of glittering crystals were hanging like icicles, or immense frozen tears. Farthest off, in the dining-room, with its dark walls, gleamed a great lamp, in its hanging bronze,

## The Argonauts

like a point of light, above the table. This point seemed very far from where Cara was standing, and in all the space between her and it there was not a voice, not a rustle, nothing living. Only once a waiter, dressed in black, passed on tip-toe through the dining-room, emerged into the full light of the lamp, and disappeared behind a door. After that there was no voice, no step, no noise—nothing living. All at once a clock began to strike nine. Its metallic sound inclined to bass, and was heard clearly in the silence which had settled in the vacant chambers. One, two, three—at the fourth stroke another clock was heard in a distant study. Its sound was thinner and more like singing—these two seemed to be a voice and its echo; the sounds from these resembled a mysterious conversation carried on by things that were inanimate.

Cara hurried then, and hastened through the drawing-rooms on tip-toe toward her mother's boudoir. Through her widely opened eyes looked fear, and under bright curls her forehead was thickly wrinkled.



## CHAPTER VIII

BECAUSE of his absence of ten days Darvid, on his return from the hunting scenes, which had passed noisily and splendidly at Prince Zeno's, rushed into the whirl of business—of labors and visits which even for him, who was so greatly trained, proved to be wearisome and difficult. He drove out; he received for long hours, both alone and with the assistance of others; he wrote, reckoned, counselled, discussed, concluded contracts, with a multitude of men. Sometimes, in the very short intervals between occupations, in his carriage, after a noisy and laborious night, or at the almost sleepless end of it, while putting himself to bed, he thought, that in every case the amusement from which he had returned a few days before had cost him more than the worth of it. His life was a belt of toil and duties, so closely woven that every interruption brought to a new point an accumulation of these toils and duties that might surpass even his powers. And what had his object been? Why had he gone? Had he found pleasure in that place? What pleasure? Those full-grown, or even old men, who found their delight, or disappointment in this, that they had hit or had missed a shot; those great lords, spending their time at a recreation which, by the uproar, the style of conversation, the spectacle of bloodshed, reminded him of the mental and physical condition of wild men—seemed to him children which were sometimes annoying and sometimes ridiculous. Such frivolous amusement, idle, somewhat savage, somewhat knightly, found no access to his brain, which had

## The Argonauts

been occupied so long with the seriousness of dates and figures. He had met there, it is true, though only once, a man in a lyric mood. A youthful person, who was riding one day at his side, and who afterward, when they halted, strove to incline him to enthusiasm because of the snow-covered field; the fresh breezes blowing over that field; the deep perspective of the forest, etc. That man was lyric. He confessed openly that the hunting was to him indifferent; that he took part in it not for game, but for nature. He loved nature. Yes, yes, Darvid knew that many people loved nature. Art and nature must be powers, since a multitude of men bow down to them. Perhaps he, too, would have done so if the career of his life had led him into their presence, but the path of his life led him in another direction, far from nature and art, hence he did not know them; he had not had the time. He looked at a field, at snow, at a forest—and he saw a field, snow, a forest—nothing higher, nothing more. He was of those who call a cat a cat, a rogue a rogue, and hold every hyperbole, ode, and enthusiasm in silent contempt. He listened to his lyric companion, at first with curiosity, investigating in the man a certain kind of people little known to him. When he had finished he listened only through politeness, and with concealed annoyance. He concealed his annoyance, and tried openly to pretend that he shared the enthusiasm, the rapture, and the gladness. He was, of course, in an assembly of very wealthy persons, standing very high. He sailed in a sea of blood purely blue, so he hid away irony, contempt, and yawning, and had on the outside only smoothness itself, affability, and general pleasantness of manner, speech, and smiles. That was also a labor, rewarded at once with a certain degree of lively enjoyment. In lordly drawing-rooms, himself the equal of the highest, while passing the time

## The Argonauts

in a friendly manner and conversing with princes he was unconscious at first that he raised his smooth, lofty forehead and gave himself out as greater than he was in reality, and inhaled with distended nostrils the odor of that grandeur which surrounded him as well as that which was his own. But soon this condition yielded to something embarrassing, not quite clearly defined, but causing this, that he did not feel altogether certain of himself and the fitness of his whole self to the surrounding. For though the politeness of those about him was unquestioned and most exquisite, though words of praise in recognition of his services and labor struck his hearing, though his strong feet had under them a foundation carved from gold; he felt strange in that position, involved in phenomena which were new to him, and bristling with difficulties. Sometimes the guests mentioned things of which he was ignorant, they used expressions which were strange to him, and referred to degrees of relationship, and events with which he was unacquainted. He began to stand guard over his own words and movements, with a mysterious fear lest something of his might come out too emphatic, or high colored for the background before which he found himself. In spite of everything which connected the man with that background, he began to feel a broad vacuum between him and it himself.

This timidity, a thing entirely new, entirely unknown to Darvid from his earliest years, was an oppression which, during the last days of the hunt, fell on him together with weariness, and some third thing—a feeling of the difference between himself and those who surrounded him. Nothing could help him: neither the iron labor which they praised audibly, nor the millions piled up by that labor—millions for which they felt unconcealed rever-

## The Argonauts

ence. Among those men into whose society he had always desired to enter as an integral part thereof, on that social height to which he had been climbing in imagination and with effort, he felt as if he were in some uneasy chair, put out in a cold wind, and deprived of every outlook. He found nothing there on which to rest his eye, or his thought. Emptiness, emptiness, weariness. A little humiliation which, like a tiny, but venomous worm, was boring into the bottom of his heart. It was not wonderful, therefore, that when he thought of how he had used his time, and of all that he had seen, heard, and passed through, there was on his lips one of those smiles most bristling with pins points, while in his mind he repeated the expression: "Wretchedness!"

He was too wise not to give this name at times to many things of the world which he desired and toward which he was struggling.

After some days of labor, so intense that it astonished those who saw it, and which weakened those who assisted in it, he received at an hour before evening, as customary, in his study, all men who came either on business, or with visits. He knew no exceptions for anyone, nor indulgence for himself. He received all, conversed with all, for it was impossible to foresee what a given man might contribute, or what he might be good for, if not at the moment, some time, if not much, then a little. But his cheeks seemed thinner than usual, and at moments his speech was less fluent. That hunting trip, and all which he had experienced at it, and afterward, days of activity and unparalleled exertion, were reflected on his face in an expression of suffering. And sometimes even a slight hesitation in speech arose from this, that his mind ran to a subject which tortured him, and raised in his breast a lump of

## The Argonauts

slimy serpents. Some hours before he had inquired of his secretary, who, in spite of youth, zeal, and wit, was bending beneath the burden of labor imposed on him, whether everything was ready for the ball to be given soon, and whether he had received directions from the lady of the house during his, Darvid's, recent absence. The secretary showed great astonishment. How was that? Then the project had not been abandoned? On the morning after the departure of his principal the secretary sought to come to an understanding with Pani Darvid on this subject, but was able to see only Panna Irene, who declared that he would receive no instructions, and that his assistance would not be needed. After that there was silence in the house, undisturbed by preparations of any kind.

"Then," said Darvid, "my wife must be out of health. She has neuralgia frequently. What is to be done? A woman's nerves are a *force majeure*."

But now, while receiving visits and speaking of business, he avoided thinking of the unexpected resistance. How was this! She—the woman for whom the highest favor, the pinnacle of happiness had been the possibility of remaining at the head of his house, in the brilliancy of wealth and general respect, dared—had the shamelessness to oppose his will! He felt such contempt that, in thought, he threw that woman on the ground to trample her; in spite of this, that, almost unconsciously, he ascribed the blame not to her, but to Irene. Almost unconsciously he saw the tall young lady; she stood before his eyes, cold and distinguished; she, who at the foot of the stairway, in the down of her black fur cloak, with an almost hard glitter in her eyes, under the fantastic hat, had said: "That ball will not be given."

## The Argonauts

That was Irene. The other woman could not have risen to this act. Did he not know her? She had always been so mild and weak—powerless, pitiable! She could not command such energy! It was Irene!

With these thoughts he pressed the hand of the last guest, and said to him at the threshold, that there was absolute need for the commercial company of which they had been talking to gain a broader foundation of activity by obtaining more and surer sources of credit.

“Credit, my dear sir, credit is the first letter in the alphabet of contemporary finance. Send some man to the capital—some man——”

He hesitated here, thinking “It was Irene!” Then he finished:

“Some man with proper authority and weight—best of all that person of whom we have been speaking. Such is my advice.”

After the last bow of the guest they closed the door of the anteroom. Darvid turned and saw Irene standing at the round table. That day, while passing on the stairs, when she was returning from a trip to the city, and he was hastening to the carriage waiting for him, they had greeted each other hurriedly and in passing. He had not a moment’s time then to talk with her; she, too, was in a hurry, for she ran up the stairs quickly.

“*Bon jour, père!*” said she, inclining her head with swift movement.

“*Bon jour, Irene,*” answered he, touching his hat. Behind him moved the secretary, carrying a heavy portfolio of papers; after her went some merchant’s servant with packages. No greeting was necessary now. Irene, standing at the table, began to speak at once:

“I have come, father, to beg you in mamma’s name and

## The Argonauts

my own for a half-an-hour's conversation, but to-day, now, absolutely."

Her bodice, which was dark and close fitting, had a very high-standing ruff, which enclosed her slightly elongated and very pale face, just as the half-open shield of a leaf encloses a white flower-bud. Her whole person, in that chamber, with its very high ceiling and massive furniture, seemed smaller and less tall than elsewhere. However, the words "now and absolutely" were spoken with such solid emphasis, that Darvid halted in the middle of the room and fixed a sharp glance on her.

"You have come in your mother's name and your own," said he. "Why this solemnity and decision? You wish, of course, to explain the reasons why your mother and you have seen fit to oppose my will."

"No, father," answered she, "but I intend to announce to you mamma's will and mine."

"As to that ball?" asked he, quickly.

"No, the question is immensely more important than the ball."

Both were silent for a moment. If the words exchanged had been less emphatic, and had followed one another less quickly, Darvid and his daughter might, perhaps, have heard, in a corner of the room, behind a wall of books arranged on highly ornamented shelves, a slight rustle which lasted a short time. Something had moved there, and then stopped moving.

"It touches an affair of immensely greater importance than the ball," repeated Irene; "namely, my mother's peace, honor, and conscience."

"What pomposity of expression!" exclaimed Darvid, with a slight smile. "I observe more and more that exaggeration is a disease in my family. I should prefer simple speech from you."



## The Argonauts

"The question before us is not a simple one, so I use a style fitted to the subject," answered Irene, and she sat down in one of the armchairs, erect, her hands on her knees, motionless, between the wide and heavy arms of the chair.

"The subject of which I have to speak with you, father, is much involved and delicate. Do you not share my opinion, that one may commit what is commonly called an offence and still possess a noble heart, and suffer greatly? In common opinion this suffering is a just punishment, or penance for the offence committed, but I consider this opinion as a painted pot, for everything in this world is so involved, so vain, and relative."

She spoke with perfect calmness, but at the last words she shrugged her shoulders slightly. Darvid looked at her with dazed eyes.

"How is this?" began he, in a low voice. "You—you—have you come to talk to me—about this? Do you know? Do you understand? And have you come to talk about—this?"

"My father," answered Irene, "to bring our conversation to any result we must first of all push away painted pots from between us."

"What does that mean?" asked Darvid.

"What does it mean? What are painted pots? They are little dabs of wretched clay, but painted in beautiful colors; they are just what naïvete, bashfulness, modesty, and darned socks like them would be to-day in my case."

She laughed.

"I have known all that has happened this long time. I was a little girl, in a corner of a room, dressing a doll, when a certain conversation between you and mamma struck my ears, and helped me considerably to understand what took place afterward. Because of business and difficulties which

## The Argonauts

swallowed your time you were ever absent, father. Oh, I have no thought of criticising you, no thought whatever. Here a question of logic presents itself, simple logic. You were chasing after that which was your happiness, the delight of your life, while mamma—poor mamma stooped to pick up also for herself a little happiness and delight. But your happiness and delight were open, brilliant, triumphant, while mamma's were always full of darkness, poison, and shame."

For the first time in that conversation her voice quivered; and, inclining her face, she brushed away from her dress, with the rosy tips of her fingers, some bit of dust that had dropped on it; then again she gazed with a look clear and calm at her father, who had sat down in front of her.

"To convince you, father," continued she, "that our conversation has a perfectly important and definite meaning I permit myself to open before you the secret, but for me, the visible springs which caused the so-called offence, and present disposition of mamma."

"It would be better to avoid this and proceed to the point directly," said David, throwing his eyeglasses on his nose with a nervous movement.

"No, father, permit me to take a few minutes of time, I beg you. This is necessary. Every man has in himself a soul, so-called, personal to him, unlike others."

She halted for a moment, shrugged her shoulders:

"For that matter, am I sure of this? The soul may be a painted pot also. But it is the usual name given to our various feelings and inclinations. So *pour le commodité de la conversation*, I shall use this word." She smiled and continued: "There are various souls, some as hard as steel, others soft as wax, some inaccessible to sentiment, others sentimental. Mamma's soul is soft and sentimental. Ten-

## The Argonauts

derness, care, confidence are as needful to her as air is to breathing. Do I know, for that matter, the various ingredients which make up the so-called love, attachment, etc. You, father, have a soul of steel and immensely great business power—we were children—Cara had barely begun to speak then. Well, a moment came—do I know when? I do not know—but—finally that happened which must have happened more than once to you in your very numerous, remote, and prolonged journeys. Do I not speak the truth?”

In the high plates of her dark ruff her face was in a blush, but she smiled a little, and with strangely flashing eyes looked directly into the face of her father.

“For,” added she, “one would need to have mental rheumatism to believe that you loved only mamma all the time, and even that you loved her in general—mamma, of course, did not think that you did.”

“Irene!” cried Darvid.

But she did not permit interruption.

“Allow me, I beg you, to say that I am not criticising. I am not in any sense. There is not a shade of criticism in what I say. I only state and expose facts and causes. That is all. This is requisite. Without this it would be impossible to understand mamma’s request and mine which I will tell you quickly. And now I return to the question of the individual soul. That is a thing of capital importance. Offences, so-called, rise from so-called mean souls, or from noble ones. Of the first I know little, but if an offence comes from a noble soul it is to that soul a great and terrible torment—I have looked at such a torment, and while looking at it I have been brought to name the so-called love, and the so-called happiness, painted pots. Idyls! There may be idyls somewhere, but that which I saw—I assure you, father, did not encourage

## The Argonauts

—did not encourage me to look at things from the idyllic angle.”

Darvid rose with an impulsive movement.

“To the question, Irene, to the question! Say what the request is for which you have come. And from what does your mother suffer so greatly? It would be better were you to tell your wish at once, and without these introductions. Do reproaches of conscience trouble your mother? I have no time for psychological analysis, and should like to finish this conversation more quickly. Well, was it that besides conscience and other things like it—she did not find in her lover the man whom her sentiment imagined? I am ashamed to speak with you of this. Tell quickly what your wish is.”

With a trembling hand he approached the end of his cigarette to the candle burning on the desk; his face now grown smaller, was contracted from the wrinkles which covered his forehead, and the countless quivers which passed across his face. Irene, very pale now, followed her father with her eyes; her lips were almost blue.

“Yes, father,” answered she, “in mamma’s soul that which we call conscience is greatly developed. Moreover, a feeling of shame in presence of us, and humiliation that everything which she has comes from you.”

At this moment something rustled again, somewhere in a corner, but no one turned attention to it.

Darvid, who passed through the room a number of times, hastily, stopped again:

“Speak more quickly,” said he, “I cannot understand what it is that your mother wishes. I left her in the position of a respected wife, of a mother, and mistress of a house. She is surrounded with luxury, she shines in society, and enjoys life.”

## The Argonauts

Irene opened her arms with a movement indicating pity:

“This which you consider as the highest favor for mamma is just what she does not wish. She does not wish to enjoy the respect of society, which she does not deserve, as she thinks; nor to make use of the luxury which comes from you, and which is bound up with speechless contempt. Mamma desires to leave this house; in general, to abandon society-life, with all its luxury and brilliancy. I have known for a considerable time of this, and therefore had the plan of marrying soon and withdrawing from here with mamma.”

Darvid put an end to his emotion; his daughter's words approached facts, and facts demanded cool blood.

“If you wish to speak of your intention to marry the baron, I must tell you——”

“You have no need to speak of that, father. I have abandoned that intention. I had it, but I have dropped it. Another plan entirely different has taken its place. You own a village in a remote province which came to you from your parents. I wish to ask you to give me that village, to endow me with it, but immediately. I suppose, I know, even, that it was your intention to give me a dowry ten times as valuable. Now, I am ready to renounce nine-tenths, orally, in writing, in every form and every manner indicated by you, but I beg you, as a favor, I beg you earnestly, for this one-tenth, and beg that I may receive it without delay.”

She bent her whole form low, and her eyes, which she raised to her father, were filled with tears; these, however, she restrained immediately. Darvid answered after a moment of silence:

“Though I do not understand this whim of yours, I do

## The Argonauts

not see in it anything impossible, or harmful. On the contrary, I shall be glad to do something which pleases you, and to-morrow, if you like, you shall be the owner of that wretched hole. But of what use can it be to you?"

Irene rose, went around the table, and, bending, pressed her father's hand to her lips; and then she returned to her former place:

"I thank you, father," said she; "you satisfy my most ardent desire. That 'wretched hole,' as you call it, is just the place that mamma desires. We shall go from here, and settle down there as quickly as possible."

"What?" cried Darvid, bending forward with astonishment, but soon he began to speak calmly:

"I come to the conclusion that when talking with my children I should not be astonished at anything. I must be ready for any surprise."

"That is natural, father, for we hardly know each other," interrupted Irene. "In reproaches of conscience," continued she, "and various other feelings of that sort, mamma goes to exaggeration, she goes so far as to desire penance, punishment, voluntarily accepted. If time and circumstances were favorable she would enter a cloister assuredly, and put on a hair shirt. That is an exaggeration, but what is to be done? Characters are various; hers is of that kind. But the desire which mamma has of withdrawing from the noise and show of the world, I understand perfectly; for, first of all——"

She made a gesture of contempt with her hand.

"All the honors, the glitter, the luxury, etc., are gates 'before which men with spades are standing;' this means that behind them we find dust, emptiness, nothing."

"Great God!" exclaimed Darvid.

"What do you say, father?" inquired she.

## The Argonauts

“Your age, the brilliant position in which you have lived since childhood—and this disenchantment.”

“Just this brilliant position, father—just because of this brilliant position, perhaps. We are not talking of me, however—but because of this, which in me you call disenchantment, I am able to understand mamma’s wish to leave society, all the more because, if I were in her position, all homage, show, luxury, amusements would for me be as impossible as they are for her. This depends on character. Moreover, mamma remembers that everything which she uses is yours, and the use of it attended by your contempt, and the evident impossibility of ever coming to any understanding is such a poison—so I beg you to give me Krynichna. I am your daughter, and, as it seems to me, you have no thought of disinheriting me, so if I own Krynichna, mamma will live with me and receive everything from me alone.”

Her voice grew weaker, and her posture less constrained, in her whole form there was an expression of suffering. Everything which she said cost her, in spite of appearances to the contrary, much effort and suffering. Darvid was silent a while, then he said:

“It seems to me that I am Ali Baba, listening to the tales of Shoherazade. If I should agree to your plan what would you do there?”

“I do not know clearly as yet. This is mamma’s idea; her wish; she will discover more and tell me. We will examine; we shall see. Into mamma’s plans, besides quiet obscurity, and modesty of life, labor enters also.”

She spoke in a low, wearied voice:

“An idyl!” laughed Darvid.

“An idyl, father; I used to laugh at all idyls without knowing that I had one in myself. It has saved me from many, and, perhaps, dreadful things. Yes, I have an idyl: I love mamma.”



## The Argonauts

Then her thin lips, famous in society for their precocious, bitter irony, quivered as do those of children when preparing to cry.

Darvid turned to her quickly, and said with a prolonged hiss:

“Why?”

She raised sad eyes to him, and with a voice in which Malvina's sweet tones were heard, she answered:

“I am not sure that anyone could tell why he or she loves. Mamma has always been kind—but I do not know—she is very pleasant, and she and I have been together always—I do not know—it may be, besides, that often I have seen her so unhappy. You see, father, that I am sincere; I answer all your questions as far as I am able. Have regard to mamma's scruples, I beg, and my request; do not oppose our plans.”

Darvid stood in the middle of the room, he raised his head, his eyes had the flash of steel.

“No,” said he. “My daughter shall not wither away in a remote corner with my consent, because it pleases her mother to hide her—shame there.”

“Father,” answered Irene, “I must explain that your resistance will only give a more permanent, and, for you, a more disagreeable, form to our withdrawal.”

She rose, and again on her face, surrounded by the high ruff, was an expression of resolve and energy. A moment before she was full of emotion and pain, now with the need of defence she found energy.

“Do you suppose, father, that you can understand what happened, forgive, to use the general phrase, and restore your esteem and friendship to mamma?”

With a form as rigid as iron, and with an evil smile on his lips, Darvid answered immediately:

## The Argonauts

“No. I am very sorry that I cannot play a comedy of noble-mindedness, for this is perhaps a popular comedy. But that of which you speak is forever and altogether impossible.”

Irene moved her head affirmatively.

“Then mamma and I must withdraw; if not to Krynichna to some remote place abroad—I know four European languages well, I know how to paint, and I know a few other things. Mamma possesses a real genius in several rare accomplishments, and you remember well her beautiful music. We will give lessons, and do something else—I know not what—we shall find means of existence. But I beg you, father, to believe that in no case shall we remain in this house.”

With pale, almost with blue lips, she laughed and added:

“Either as inhabitants of Krynichna, or making our own living in some distant place—which do you prefer, father? In the last instance it depends on you. One of these two things we shall do most certainly; that is, properly speaking, I shall do it; I, who am mamma’s only defence. I became of age some months ago. I have finished my twenty-first year, and—no one can hinder me from acting in this way.”

Whoever had seen her at that moment would have believed, perforce, that no man and no thing would have power to hinder her in carrying out her resolve. Omitting differences of age and sex, she seemed the living portrait of her father. The same cold self-confidence as in him; the same clear penetrating glance as of steel; the same enigmatical smile on impressionable and also cold lips. As if involuntarily, and lowering her voice, she said in addition:

“It is our duty to put a radical stop to the family idyl out of regard also to Cara. She is innocent yet—she

## The Argonauts

knows nothing—she loves all, and not only loves but worships. Life has not touched her, even with the tip of one of its angel feathers. Just imagine what would happen if, into that little volcano of lofty feeling, a spark of this knowledge were to fall. And this may happen any moment. If we do not change the condition of affairs it will happen.”

She was silent, and Darvid was silent also. It might seem that he recognized only Irene’s last argument as worthy of attention. The two voices had grown silent, one after the other; then, somewhere in the corner of the room, was heard a rustle, not so low as before, far stronger, a low knocking rather than a rustle, and almost at the same time a servant in the open door of the antechamber called:

“The horses are ready.”

Irene, who had turned her face toward the rustle, or knocking, thought some of the countless papers in the room had dropped from the furniture, or that some book had fallen. Darvid, who also had heard the knocking, or rustle, forgot it while looking at his watch.

“I shall be late,” said he. “You have told me things over which I must meditate. I cannot deny that they possess considerable importance. Hence, I delay, and shall beg you soon to continue this conversation. Good-night, and perhaps till to-morrow.”

“Let it be only till to-morrow. I beg you, father. To-morrow.”

Miss Mary was sitting in her pupil’s bedroom, a beautiful nest which wealth had formed as a symbol of the spring-time of life. From the top of the walls to the bottom, cretonne, interchanged with muslin, formed succeeding folds on which the freshest flowers of spring seemed to have been scattered. The walls, the windows, the furniture

## The Argonauts

were covered with a shower of forget-me-nots and rose-buds, strewn on grounds of yellow as pale as if sunlight had penetrated them slightly. Groups of green plants at the windows looked like little groves made ready for the songs of nightingales; artistic playthings, porcelain figures, suggested a child amused with dolls yet; but a multitude of large books in gilt bindings suggested the active and methodical development of a young mind, which surely had dreams of Paradise on that lace and satin bed which covered a bedstead inlaid with mother-of-pearl. On all the furniture: small arm-chairs, tables, screens, which reminded one of butterfly-wings, mother-of-pearl rainbow-tints passed into milk-white. Spring tones, joyous motives, light and graceful forms, filled the room of that little daughter of a millionaire with an atmosphere of childish innocence and tenderness; it was lighted, from floor to ceiling, and from wall to wall, with a cheering light, poured from the rosy tulip-shaped shade of a grand lamp.

In that rosy lamp-light Miss Mary seemed full of care. Under her smooth hair her forehead was smooth and calm, but in her thoughtful eyes, and in the way that her head rested on her hand, anxiety was evident. Conscientiously devoted to the duties undertaken by her, she retained the warmth and purity which permeated the house of an Anglican pastor; chance had committed to her care, in a strange atmosphere, a rare spirit, one of those which come to the world in the form of a flame. Even three years earlier, Cara had seemed to her, at first glance, one of those souls for whom life is love, worship, trust, and—nothing more. No ambitions or imaginings beyond those. All her thoughts and wishes issued from her heart and went back to it. Her innate sensitiveness was inexplicable in its source, just as

## The Argonauts

genius is in other persons. Sensitiveness in her demanded the accomplishment of her wishes as imperiously as, in organisms of another sort, hunger claims satisfaction for the body. She was by nature a flame and a bird. The riddle of her existence was involved in two words: to blaze and to fly. Besides, she had impulse and caprice; she loved to twitter, and to laugh quietly in a corner. From the thoughtfulness into which she dropped oftener and oftener, she woke up as a gladsome and petted child; that room was filled with her quick speech, her thin voice, her gestures, almost theatrical, her laughing, her humming, and at times all the drawing-rooms were filled with them.

This day she woke up full of twittering, and before dressing threw her bare arms around Miss Mary, looking into her eyes, declaiming verses, telling childish dreams.

"Why are you so delighted?" inquired Miss Mary. "Is it at the coming ball?"

Cara pouted her scarlet lips contemptuously, and answered:

"The ball! What do I care? I do not want the ball! Mamma and Ira do not want it either, so I will go to-day and beg father to defer it. But I am delighted this morning! The sun is so pleasant! Do you see how the rays quiver; how they slip among the leaves, like little snakes, or spring, like golden butterflies?"

With outstretched finger she showed the play of sunrays among the clumps of green at the windows; herself in white muslin which covered her slender neck and childish breast, and with naked arms, she might remind one of a butterfly escaping from the chrysalis of childhood.

In the evening (of that day) Cara circled about the room; her mouth filled with historical names, and lines of poetry, with which she had been occupied all day. Finally, she

## The Argonauts

caught Puffie in her arms, and, courtesying so low before Miss Mary that she touched the floor, announced that she was going to her father. From time immemorial she had not talked with him a moment. Sometimes he was going out, or had not the time. But to-day she would watch him, she would wait till all his business was finished, all his guests gone; she would seize her father and bring him to her mother's study. Miss Mary would go there; perhaps Maryan would be there too.

Her idyllic heart, like a bird in a grove, was eternally dreaming of quiet retreats, of confidential talks, of the attachment of hearts and the pressure of hands. Her picture of the Anglican rectory taken from Miss Mary's narrative, and situated in a grove of old oaks, smiled at her like a bit of Paradise. "But mamma's study is so quiet, and full of fragrant flowers——"

An hour had passed since she had skipped away with Puffie in her arms, and with the reflection of a bit of Paradise in her eyes. Miss Mary felt alarmed. For some time she had felt continual alarm. She observed carefully the change taking place in Cara's disposition, and discovered in it causes for anxiety. But she could do nothing. While she was friendly to the family to which fate had brought her, and while she experienced from it kindness mingled with respect, it was to her a stranger. She observed everything, and said nothing. She strove, more and more, to be inseparable from Cara, and to turn her attention toward things of remote interest. That was a splendid mansion, but terrors were roaming around in its drawing-rooms, among plushes, mirrors, damasks, satins, and gold.

From the gates of the mansion, the rumble of a carriage went forth, grew faint in the street, and was lost in the distance. The master of the mansion was in that carriage

## The Argonauts

which sank in the uproar of the city, to return, barely, at daybreak. A quarter of an hour passed, Cara did not return. Maybe she went to her mother? Another quarter of an hour. Miss Mary rose up, took a small candlestick in her hand with a candle, which she lighted to use in her wandering through the series of drawing-rooms. But among the soft folds of cretonne and muslin the lofty door, ornamented with gilded arabesques and borders, opened slowly, and Cara walked into the chamber holding Puffie at her bosom. Her face was so bent that the lower part of it was hidden in the silky coat of the little animal. Miss Mary, sitting down again, inquired:

“Where were you, Cara, after your father went away? With mamma?”

In answer, a few steps from the door, the sound of a fall was heard. That was Puff, he had dropped from her arms to the floor. She had let him slip down along her dress. Cara had never treated her favorite with such indifference, or so carelessly. Leaning forward, Miss Mary fixed her eyes on the young girl. Oh, my God! What has happened? Who can tell, but something has happened, that is certain. Cara's cheeks, recalling usually the leaves of a full rose, were as white as the soft muslin covering her chamber, and her lips, always scarlet, formed a barely visible line, pale and narrow. Tall, slender, and erect, without the slightest movement of hand or head, with dry eyes looking somewhere into remoteness, she passed through the room, and with automatic movement dropped into a low chair near Miss Mary, who touched her hand and felt the cold of ice in it.

“What is the matter, my dear? Are you ill?”

Instead of giving an answer Cara rose and went to the cluster of green plants at the window. With her shoulders



## The Argonauts

turned toward Miss Mary, she seemed to be looking at the plants; but, after a few minutes, she turned, and making some steps stopped, with her eyes fixed on the floor.

“Cara, come to me!” cried Miss Mary.

She went, and sat down at her side. The English girl looked at her sharply, and asked in a low voice:

“Have you met anything disagreeable? Or anyone? Or has anyone——”

She did not finish, for the delicate, pale face turned from her with quick movement, and said very hurriedly:

“No! no! no!”

Then the slender form of the girl slipped slowly from the chair to the carpet, and her head rested heavily on the knees of her governess. But barely had the soft hand of the English girl touched her hair, when Cara rose and went to the other side of the room, where the light screen, struck by her skirt, tottered and fell with a clatter. Without noticing the noise Cara turned now toward the lamp, and with a face which was growing ever paler she sat down opposite Miss Mary and opened one of the books lying on the table. Her brows were raised, this brought many wrinkles to her forehead; for a time it seemed as though she were reading, then she closed the book with a sudden gesture, stood up again, and went toward the door leading to the drawing-rooms.

“Are you going to your mamma?”

She made no answer, but sat on a low stool near the door. Puff went up, and, putting his forepaws on her knees, licked her hand. But that hand, usually so fondling, pushed the little dog far away with a sudden movement. Miss Mary rose, and was going to the stool, but she had hardly reached the middle of the room when Cara rose again and went to meet her. The English girl seized both her hands.

## The Argonauts

“My dear,” began the governess, “you frighten me. What has happened? What is your trouble? You should have confidence in me—I am your friend, and a friend of your family—perhaps, I can explain, or help you in some way. Has anything happened? Has there been an accident? What is it that troubles you?”

The dry, dark eyes of the girl, looking, as it were, from some distant depth, met the kindly glance of her friend, and this whisper came from her lips:

“Nothing! Nothing!”

Then going some steps, she stopped at the table with the lamp on it, and again opened one of the books there. Miss Mary followed, put her arm around Cara, and wished to draw her near, but she, with an alarmed and supple movement, slipped from her embrace, put the book down, and turning, started to go somewhere. Miss Mary faced toward the door, and said:

“I will go for your mother.”

But that instant she was frightened; for Cara, recovering her voice at once, screamed:

“No!”

Her eyes grew wild, and she began to tremble.

There was no doubt: In the row of empty drawing-rooms which stretched beyond that door, ornamented with arabesques and gilded borders, the girl had seen some horror. But what the horror was, and whence it had crept forth, Miss Mary did not know. She sat down, and pale with fear, placed her helpless hands upon her knees. What could she do in presence of those blue lips, which were as silent as if shut by some seal, either sacred or infernal? What could she do? Cara’s father was not at home, and to call her mother, when the very mention of that mother brought a cry of terror from the girl’s breast, would have

## The Argonauts

been a useless cruelty. Her brother? Her elder sister? Miss Mary's hand moved in a manner indicating doubt. It was necessary to wait, to leave her some time to herself. She might grow calm, overcome her fear, speak.

Left to herself Cara went to the bed, knelt by it, and buried her face in the coverlet; but a few minutes later she wound her lithe form like the twist of a serpent, and turned her face toward the ceiling. She remained in this posture rather long, only changing, from time to time, the position of her head, which rested on the coverlet.

Miss Mary remembered people seized with violent pains, who, in the fruitless hope of allaying them, changed positions and postures continually. She remembered, also, the faintness and weariness which cover the faces of people with pallor and an expression of unbearable disgust. A certain disgust, repulsive and unendurable, must be working in that slender breast, from which a low moan came when she turned her head from side to side.

"Are you ill, dearest Cara; are you in pain?"

From the bed, in a scarcely audible whisper, came:

"No."

She rose, went to Miss Mary, sat on the carpet, put her head on the English girl's knee, with her face toward the ceiling. She threw her hands back on her dishevelled hair, and then let them drop without control, so that they fell on the carpet as if lifeless. Her dry, inflamed eyes continued to look at the ceiling. Miss Mary, bent, and making her words as low and fondling as human words could be, inquired again:

"Has anything happened? Has anything hurt you?"

Changing the position of her head, and shaking it, as if she wished to shake something off, she whispered:

"Nothing."

## The Argonauts

And rising, she went again to the end of the room. Her hair, not long, but thick, like a bundle of silken flax, lay motionless on her narrow shoulders; her pendent hands seemed like two rose-buds falling from a bush. She stood again for a moment before the clump of green plants, then went around it and hid beyond the thickest palms at the window. Outside the window was the darkness of a winter evening, relieved somewhat by snow which covered the broad garden. The darkness was spotted by red lamps, which illuminated the street beyond the garden. Some months before, Cara had opened a window overlooking that same garden; she did this in the middle of the night to look at the first snow and at the frost in the moonlight. Snow was lying there now, at the close of winter, surely the last snow.

Much time passed. Miss Mary rose, and went to the narrow space between the clump of plants and the window. Cara was standing there at the very window, looking into the darkness, or at the red spots made by lanterns, placed here and there in it. The governess saw that a change had taken place in her. She was not pale as before; on the contrary, a lively flush had come out on her face. Her features were less rigid; instead of the nauseous disgust and dull pain, an expression of deep thought had covered them. As happened often when Cara was thinking deeply, the point of her finger was in her mouth. Miss Mary felt relieved. "Cara is no longer pale," thought she; "she has stopped over something; she stands long in one place; she is recovering her balance; soon she will be pacified completely, and will tell what has happened."

"Do you not wish me to read to you?"

Cara shook her head, and said in a low voice :

"I want to sleep."

## The Argonauts

"To sleep! so early? But you are tired, of course. Very well, dear. Lie down and rest. I will call Ludvika to open the bed. Or no—I will do it myself. No one need make a noise here that would prevent us from talking."

With great goodness and kindly grace, while arranging the bed with a rustle of silk, and the waves of lace going through her fingers, Miss Mary told vivaciously of many things which were near and confidential, things always affecting Cara, and though no answer came to her from beyond the green plants, her voice, which sounded agreeably, scattered the gloom and silence of the chamber.

Half an hour later the door to the drawing-room was opened partly, and the voice of Irene said some words in English. Miss Mary went to the door on tip-toe.

"Cara is sleeping already," whispered she; "we ought not to wake her; she is a little unwell."

The door was closed slowly and in silence; some minutes later the maid brought a tray in with tea and many dishes. Soon after Malvina entered the room. She approached her daughter's bed quietly, and anxious.

"What is the matter?" whispered she. "Why did she go to bed so early?"

Miss Mary gave some pacifying answer. That was caution. She felt always in that house, and on that day more than ever, the need of caution in making observations. Both looked at the girl, who, as they thought, was sleeping soundly; she breathed slowly and evenly, with a deep flush on her cheeks.

Malvina bent down and impressed a long kiss on the forehead of her sleeping daughter. Then Miss Mary noted something of which she was not sure: when her mother's lips rested on Cara's forehead a quiver ran through the girl's body, from head to foot. But Miss Mary was not sure

## The Argonauts

whether Cara really trembled, or it only seemed so to her. After Malvina's departure she remained at the bedside, with eyes fixed on the delicate face, which was growing more inflamed with an ever-increasing flush. A number of dark spots came out on her purple lips, which were parched and half open, her small pearl-like teeth gleamed behind them.

"She is sick, but has fallen asleep!" thought Miss Mary. "Perhaps that horror, which I thought seized the child in the empty drawing-rooms, was an invention of her mind? Surely it was nothing more; she is simply ill; perhaps, not very ill, since she fell asleep so quickly."

The small night-lamp shone in Cara's room like a blue spark. In the adjoining room, beyond the open door, far into the night, rustled book-leaves turned by the English governess. Miss Mary watched long, and stood often in the open door, between her room and Cara's, inclining forward, looking from a distance at the bed from which the regular, unbroken sound of breathing came to her. She is asleep. She moved a number of times and groaned, then again she was silent. Puff lay at her feet, like a bundle of ash-colored silk, and snored slightly. The street beyond the garden grew more and more silent till it was silent altogether. At the windows light began to whiten the shades and to draw aside the black curtain of darkness which was on the furniture. The wearied Miss Mary, in a long dressing-gown, ready to spring from her bed any moment, slept for a short time and then woke with a feeling of great fear. She was roused by a sharp cold by a breath of frosty air coming in through the open door. She sprang up and ran, with a cry, to Cara's chamber. There, on the threshold she saw beyond the spreading palm leaves the great window half open, and a slender, white figure sitting there in the gray dawn. When had she done that? How long had she sat there with her

## The Argonauts

shoulders resting on the window-frame, with her naked feet hanging in the air, with her breast and arms stripped even of muslin? No one was ever to know.

Miss Mary, while carrying the girl to bed with that strength which only terror can give one, felt in her embrace, limbs as stiff as those of a frozen corpse; but her breast rose and fell with her breathing which was heavy and audible; her cheeks and forehead were burning. In half a minute the window was closed; Miss Mary, with all the strength of long and supple arms, strove to warm the breast and shoulders, which were as cold as ice, and the skin on them stiffened.

"Oh, child! you unkind! most dear! poor child! Why have you done this? Is it possible to do such things? Did you know what you were doing? Was that an unfortunate accident, or did you do it purposely? Tell, was it done purposely? Tell me! tell!"

Cara for the first time looked straight into Miss Mary's face; she bent her head with a lively movement; her eyes shot forth triumph; a smile encircled her parched lips. In the glitter of her eyes, in the smile, in the curve of her neck, for the twinkle of an eye, shone forth once again the wilful, capricious Cara. Next moment her teeth began to chatter and her whole body trembled in a feverish chill, so that the silk of the bed rustled loudly. With that rustling was joined a dry, unbroken cough, which shook the fragile and ice-cold breast, the skin of which was rough, and had a tanned and withered look. Miss Mary sprang from her knees. On her lips were the words:

"Her parents! A doctor!"

The rumbling of a carriage was heard far away on the street, it drew nearer and nearer, rolled in through the gate of the house, and was silent. Miss Mary, all in white, her



## The Argonauts

hair hanging over her shoulders, hastened to Darvid's study, through drawing-rooms in which, from behind black veils which the pale dawn was removing, emerged glass, metal, pictures, mirrors, plush, silk, polished surfaces, gildings, mosaics, marbles, porcelain, in the dull gleam of their colors.

The dawn was in Darvid's study also; but the servant was lighting the hanging-lamp over the round table. Darvid, very pale, with a nervous movement, tore rather than drew the gloves from his hands.

"Then did she return from me? Where did she come from? You say that she was with me, and returned—in that condition? But she was not here yesterday; I did not see her; she was not here——"

"She was," answered Miss Mary; "she said that she was going to you; she did not return for more than an hour."

"She might have been with her mother?"

"No; I asked her sister about that. She was not with her mother; she was here."

Darvid was astonished; he thought a while, and called suddenly:

"Ah!"

There was something tragic in the gesture with which he indicated the thick case full of books, forming with the two walls a little triangular space; then in the manner in which he intertwined his fingers:

"She was there! And—she heard! Ah!"

He stood for a moment as if rooted to the floor; he bit his lip; there were quivers on his cheeks and wrinkles on his forehead; then he approached Miss Mary, and asked in such a low voice that she barely heard him:

"Did she do this purposely—purposely? Purposely?"

With clasped hands she said in a very low voice:

## The Argonauts

"I cannot hide—maybe something will depend on this—she did it purposely."

Then that man, usually calm and regular in all his movements, rushed to the door of the antechamber with the spring of a tiger.

"Carriage!" cried he.

When the most famous doctor in the city came out of the sick girl's chamber that day for the second time, Darvid met him in the blue drawing-room, alone. He was as usual self-possessed, and with a pleasing smile in the presence of that man with a great name.

"Is the disease defined?" asked he.

It was defined, and very serious. Inflammation had seized the greater part of the lungs, and was working fiercely on an organism weakened by a previous attack. Besides, some kind of complication had supervened, something coming from the brain, from the nerves, something psychic.

Darvid mentioned a consultation.

"We may summon from abroad—from Paris, from Vienna; we have telegraphs and railroads at our service—as to expense—" concluded he with indifference—"as to expense, I shall not spare it. My whole fortune is at the disposal of——"

He fixed in the eyes of the doctor a look in which was the desire for a silent understanding.

"This is no hyperbole, or figure of rhetoric. I am ready to summon half medical Europe, and spend half my fortune."

There was a quiver on his temples, around his mouth, and near his eyes, but he smiled. The doctor smiled also.

"My dear sir," said he, "the case is not so peculiar as to need presentation before the judgment of Europe. But being in Europe—yes. I will serve you at once with the names of my foreign colleagues. But as to colossal money

## The Argonauts

sacrifices, I must say that they will not help. Death, my dear sir, is such a giantess, that if she is to come, mountains of gold will not stop her. I will not say that she must come surely in this case. But if she is to come, half your fortune—that is, golden mountains—yes, golden mountains will be no hindrance to her. She will spring over them and—come.”

After the doctor had gone, Darvid remained alone for a while, and, with his eyes fixed on the floor, he thought:

“A giantess! Golden mountains will not stop her! True, but science is also a giantess. And, besides, is human, and every human thing travels in golden chariots. But to set one giantess against the other, gold and energy are needed.”

For some time the great study was seething with activity, in sending letters and telegrams. Darvid was heard commanding and giving directions in a voice always low, but emphatic. He was decisive, cool, and active, as he always was when going to a contest. In the course of a few minutes arriving carriages halted, one after another, before the gate of the mansion. Out of them issued men full of importance, with famous names, very learned, specialists, old and young, strong in theory and practice. Some of these men it was almost impossible to see, for they were reposing in wealth and on laurels, but they had been snatched from their rest by the rumble of the golden chariot which came for them. There were many of these men. The blue room grew black from their garments as from a cloud. Darvid pressed their hands a little more firmly than he was wont to do; perhaps his side-whiskers dropped a little less symmetrically than usual, along cheeks somewhat paler than usual, but there was no other change in the man. And when the cloud of dark garments flowed from the blue room to the chamber of his daughter, a spark of triumph glittered

## The Argonauts

in his eye. Let one giantess fight with the other; we shall see which one wins. The power of science was one of the very few articles of Darvid's faith. That power had to be great, since it was indispensable in the conquest of wealth. He had tried that power more than once in his mighty struggles for wealth; he would try it now, also. This was only the beginning of the battle. Diseases last a series of days, sometimes weeks, but to-morrow, after to-morrow, Europe will begin to ride hither on the golden chariot. Giantess against giantess! We shall see their force.

Inflammation extending with great rapidity in the weak breast of the girl, besides a complication of the brain, not considerable, but giving much cause for concern—the normal condition of the mind shaken—that was the case. A long consultation was carried on in an undertone; some medicines were prescribed, and some advice given, in the domain of hygiene. Among the carriages which left the gate of the mansion, two were empty. The two dignitaries of science, who had remained in his house, Darvid conducted to his study for black coffee, excellent liquors, and cigars of uncommon quality. They had to remain some hours, then they would be relieved by others. They opposed this wish at first, for it was in opposition to their customs, to obligations assumed elsewhere; but Darvid, with his eyes looking very kindly into theirs, uttered a magic word. It was a figure unheard of—almost fabulous. They hesitated still; resisted; then they came to an understanding as to the how-and-when—and remained. Darvid's forehead smoothed for the moment, all wrinkles vanished from it. His child (in his mind he added), "my little one," during one hour of the day or night would not be without the good giantess, who would do battle against the wicked one.

In the city, people said that Darvid, in anxiety for his

## The Argonauts

daughter would commit some mad folly; but those who had seen him shrugged their shoulders. Not at all! There was not a man on earth who could preserve better, in such straits, cool blood, self-confidence, fluent speech, affability perfect, though cold. Only at times, from the quiver which ran over his face, from the temporary stare of his eyes, and the slight carelessness in dressing his hair, was it possible to divine in him a man playing for great stakes. Really, in the battle which he had begun and was fighting, the question was not of Cara alone—it was of her above all, but not of her alone. At the bottom of his being he felt himself a player, then, as he had been countless times before in cases wholly different; a player aided by energy, money, and universal reason, which was his own and that bought by money. The stakes in this play were not only the life of his child, but the one faith which he had—his faith in the all-mightiness, and all-effectiveness of energy, sound sense, and money.

At one time and another, either with the doctors, or without them, Darvid entered Cara's chamber; where, in obedience to medical advice, they had not darkened the great windows through which light was pouring in its golden torrents. This light penetrated the yellowish folds of cretonne at the walls, lent apparent life to forget-me-nots and rose-buds scattered over them, played among the palm leaves, lay on the flowery carpet, struck out golden sparks on the gilding of toys and books, played with rainbow gleams on surfaces inlaid with mother-of-pearl. In this gleaming light, near the mirror, which was surrounded by porcelain flowers, amid flasks gilded and enamelled, a rosy Cupid was drawing a bow with a golden arrow, a marble cat lay at the feet of a statuette, which held a dove at its bosom; on a small desk of lapis-lazuli as blue as the

## The Argonauts

sky, a bronze statuette personifying the Dew was inclining gracefully an amphora above an open book, skeins of various colored silks were hanging at little looms. Amid all these tones of spring, joyous themes, light and graceful forms, the sunlight went to Cara's bed, and, from the white cambric on which she was lying, increased the paleness of her yellow hair. On the pillow with lace it was difficult at first to distinguish where the sunrays ended and the maiden's hair began. But, amid the yellow of the rays and the hair, her oval, delicate face in its bright flush seemed a scarlet flower. Her lips, blooming with a bloody purple, her eyes, flashing with a dry fire, were silent. But her breast labored with hoarse, hurried breathing, and a cough shook her body, the slender, fragile form of which was indicated beneath the blue silk coverlet, like a fine piece of sculpture.

When Darvid entered the chamber a dark-robed woman drew back from the bed of the suffering Cara, without the least rustle, and stood at some distance with a pained, pallid face under smoothly dressed hair of the same hue exactly as that which, in dishevelled abundance, lay mingled with pale sunrays on the pillow of the sick girl.

"How is it with you, little one?" asked Darvid. "Perhaps you feel somewhat better? Perhaps you would like something?"

For its only answer the face, which was like a scarlet flower, turned toward the wall, covered with forget-me-nots and rose-buds.

"Why not answer, Cara? Perhaps you would like something? Only say, only whisper. Say into my ear. I would bring you anything, get it, buy it. Perhaps you would like something? Have something, something to look at. You can have anything—anything, only say what it is—whisper in my ear."

## The Argonauts

But in vain he bent low, brought his ear to her lips almost, no sound came from them, no whisper, only her face turned away still more and her breath became hoarser and heavier.

How many times did he go there and put to her the question: "Would you like something? Will you tell what?" He thought that the young girl, though sick, must remember some wish, some desire which, if granted, might give her relief and some comfort. He had power to gratify every wish, even the wildest, but had not the power of drawing from her lips even one word, and that the briefest.

Some days passed. In front of the mansion the carriages of doctors were arriving and departing continually, meeting on the way a multitude of equipages from which men came out and entered the study of the master of the mansion, or only came to the entrance to inscribe their names in a book furnished by the Swiss in livery. Once, when coming home, Darvid met on the stairway two men who spoke a foreign language. He was eloquent, triumphant. These were allies from abroad, coming to strengthen the local forces, which joined them in full array for a consultation. Again a cloud of black garments moved from the blue room to the chamber which was full of spring colors, of childhood's playthings, of mother-of-pearl rainbow gleams. One more mountain of gold and of intellect set up as a bulwark of defence near the bed of the sick girl. When the cloud of black garments and serious faces had vanished, the mother drew near:

"These gentlemen have wearied you. That is nothing. Because they have come you will be well. Those are very wise men. The two who have just come are Germans; throughout the whole world they are famous. They will cure you to a certainty. But now you may swallow a little of those excellent sweets which those gentlemen let us give



## The Argonauts

you. Or a drop of wine. Perhaps a spoonful, one little spoonful of bouillon?"

Cara's only answer was to turn on her yellowish bed to the wall sprinkled with spring flowers, her face in scarlet flushes. Malvina, bending low, kissed the little hand, the heat of which burnt her lips, and which trembled under those lips, like a leaf in a blast of wind.

"Why not answer me, Cara? One word! only one short, little word! Shall I give a drop of wine? Those gentlemen ordered it—will you have it now? Whisper!"

But in vain did she put her ear almost down to Cara's lips, not a sound, not a whisper, she only turned her face away farther, while her breath grew in hoarseness.

Maryan came in with a great bouquet of flowers in his hand.

"What, are we sick, little one!" began he. "Well, that is nothing wonderful! King Solomon said that for every-one there must be a time for sickness and a time for dancing. You will be sick a little while, and then you will dance. But now I have brought flowers to cheer you. Flowers without odor, for sick girls might get headache from fragrant ones. These have no fragrance, but they are very beautiful. You will look most poetic when I scatter them on the bed before you. They will gladden your sight after looking at those dreary pedants who are like a flock of wise ravens. Father has brought in the wisest ravens from all the world for you; I have gathered throughout this whole city the most beautiful flowers. *Mein Liebchen, was willst du mehr?*"

While laughing he scattered on the blue coverlet, and on the slender form of the maiden indicated under it, the most beautiful flowers which the best conservatories could yield to him; she only looked at her brother with great burning eyes, and when he went away she began, with a slow and

## The Argonauts

monotonous movement to throw them from the bed. She did not look at these flowers, but the slender, dry, rosy hand of the girl worked and worked on, pushing from the bed the rich twigs and beautiful flowers, which fell, one after another, with a dull rustle on the carpet. She wanted nothing. But in the night, when Malvina and Miss Mary thought that she was sleeping, a whisper was heard in the deep stillness calling:

“Puffie! Puffie!”

Miss Mary raised the little dog from a neighboring chair and gave him to her. Cara took him in her burning hands, but soon she pushed him away with the same kind of slow gesture with which she had thrown down the flowers, turned her face toward the wall, and then whispered:

“No.”

Next morning the faces of the “wise ravens” were very gloomy. Those who flew in from the neighborhood, and those who came from a distance took on more and more that mysterious solemnity which reminds one of death-bells.

But Darvid waited yet; he did not lay down his arms; he did not lose faith in the power of the good giantess. He waited for a new reinforcement. This was the greatest medical name in all Europe, that of a man who had the fame almost of one who worked miracles. Here again was a mountain of gold, and of intellect piled up, the highest mountain among all of them.

In the blue drawing-room a suppressed, many-tongued murmur was heard. Servants bore about food and drink. Darvid gave cigars to his worthy guests, the most worthy of all, he who had just arrived; listened with close attention to the explanation of his colleagues touching the case before which he was to find himself. At last, calm, and perfectly correct, with a pleasant smile on his lips, a smile almost of

## The Argonauts

triumph, Darvid indicated with a gesture full of welcome the door of his daughter's chamber. The most famous of the famous entered first, and stopped some steps from the threshold; behind him stopped the others. On the parched lips of the sick girl appeared ruby-like drops of blood; her eyes were opened very widely; to her forehead, which was damp from perspiration, some slender locks of pale, yellow hair adhered. Throughout the room sounded in an audible, hoarse whisper:

“Ira! Ira!”

Irene approached quickly, and, bending over, removed, delicately, with a thin handkerchief, the liquid rubies from the lips of her sister.

“What do you want, little one; what do you wish?”

Cara fixed on her sister eyes in which something uncommon had begun to take place, for the dark pupils became larger every moment, and larger, more prominent, they seemed to grow and to swell, as if concentrating into one point all power of vision, until a glassy film began to come down over them, and at the same time her lips, sprinkled with blood, moved a number of times wishing to pronounce something and not being able. At last, fixing on her sister from behind the glassy film the sight of her swollen pupils, Cara, as if in sign that she understood, shook her head, and with a whisper which was heard through the room with a note of alarm and complaint, she said:

“Pain-ted pots!”

Then in her breast a great orchestra began to play: hoarse, discordant, wheezing, and her head, grown suddenly heavy, fell into the pillow deeply. From the assembly of men standing there at the door, the most famous, the small sprightly, iron-gray Frenchman, with a face greatly thoughtful, advanced a few steps, stood at the bedside, and after some

## The Argonauts

minutes, with his hands resting on the laboring bosom, cast into the deep silence which possessed the room these words:

“The agony!”

As if in answer to that word, at the very door, behind the cloud of black garments, was heard a loud hand-clap. That was Darvid, who, with a movement most unexpected for him, had in this manner wrung his hands, intertwining them with a strength which almost broke his fingers, and then raised them above his head.

So the giantess had sprung over all the mountains—and had come!

## CHAPTER IX

FROM street to street, and from one alley of the public garden to another, passed Arthur Kranitski, with the step and the mien of a person who is strolling through a city without great desire or object. In his shining hat and well-fitting fur coat, on the costly collar of which traces of wear were observable, the man seemed notably older and poorer in some sort than he had been during a past which was still recent. In his erect form and springy step one might discover that disagreeable effort with which people guard themselves when they fear lest observers may penetrate their sad secret in some way. But despite every effort Kranitski's secret was manifest sometimes in his stooping shoulders, drooping head, pendant cheeks, and dimmed glances. All this was the more evident since Pan Arthur was advancing in the full gleam of the sun which flooded with light the sidewalks of the streets and the alleys of the great public garden. The end of the winter had been exceptionally mild and serene, the snow had almost melted away, and only, here and there, mingled its dull white with the azure of the sky and the golden hue of the atmosphere. While passing multitudes of people, Kranitski raised his hand to his hat frequently, and at times, with a smile which was winning, nay, almost seductive, he made movements as if to approach, or even spring forward to those whom he greeted; but they, with a courteous though prompt inclination, moved past the man swiftly. These persons were stylish young gentlemen

## The Argonauts

conversing with one another vivaciously, or young ladies hastening to some point. They returned bow after bow, but none took note of Kranitski's desire to draw near, or, at least, none had the wish to observe it. Each man or woman had some person at his side or hers with whom to converse, and was going, or even hastening, to some place. How recent and intimate had been his acquaintance with those persons!—he had known them from early childhood. He knew everything touching them: the names and life-histories of their parents, the nicknames given them in jest or in tenderness, names given at an age when they were barely lisping. He knew every chamber, almost every corner of the houses in which they had been reared. He had raised many of them in his strong arms from the floor—he who at that time was the praised, the beloved, the sought for. He who had amused and entertained them, was he, indeed, to imagine a day when they would pass him at a distance and indifferently? How could he? He with rosy glasses on his eyes, those eyes famed at that period for beauty, had been given to tenderness and attachments; he had considered the feelings and relations of men as eternal. But from various causes a multitude of his relations with people had ended already—and now they were ending to the last one. He had the vivid sensation of hanging in a vacuum, and felt a growing need to grasp after something or someone lest he might tumble into a place which he knew not, but which he felt must be abyss-like. At the beginning of his walk he thought that in that bright hour of the day when throngs of gayly-dressed people were covering the sidewalks, and the middle of the street was filled with passing carriages, some person would stop him, would invite him, would attend him somewhere, or take him to some place. What was he to do now? Whither was he to go? Baron Emil, whose mediæval man-

## The Argonauts

sion had been in recent days almost his one refuge from weariness and lonely tedium, had gone to his estate to make trips in various directions and search in village cottages and under their roofs for remnants of art which were genuine or suitable. He was to return soon; but, meanwhile, Kranitski could not sit in the broad chair before Tristan, who was giving obeisance on the wall of the chamber to Isolde, nor sit at the table where, besides gastronomic tidbits, he found conversation to which he was accustomed, nor in presence of the Triumph of Death sweeping through the air on bat wings, or experience the tone of beyond-the-worldness. With the departure of the baron he lost the only ground on which he met Maryan—that dear child. The very thought now of Maryan, from whom after so many years of life in common he was separated, brought tears to Kranitski's eyelids.

He took a seat on a bench of the garden, and wishing to light a cigarette drew the golden case from his pocket. He did not light the cigarette, however; for there, beyond the low paling near which he was sitting, passed a splendid carriage drawn by two horses and bearing servants in livery. In that carriage sat a man of thirty years, at sight of whom Kranitski pushed forward as if to rush after him, as if to fly like the wind to him. This young man was the son of Count Alfred, of him whom Kranitski had nursed with endless devotion during illness under the sky of Italy. In those days the young man was a child, and remembered little of the hours in which Kranitski had occupied in his family the place of the best of friends, and somewhat that of the most faithful of servants. Afterward he forgot those hours completely, and put away by degrees "that excellent Kranitski," who was growing old; and though this Kranitski, on a time, had rendered some sort of service to the young man's



## The Aigonauts

father, he had been rewarded richly by resorting to the house for years, and, very likely, by loans of money given frequently and with no thought of payment. Very wealthy and a frequent traveller, Count Arthur's son had too many affairs on his head, and too many in it to cherish any desire of stuffing it further with old-fashioned trumpery. Kranitski soon observed this frame of mind in the young son of his former friend and protector, and he had long considered that house as lost and its master as a stranger. This did not sadden him at first over much, for he had a port, which he entered with full sail at all times. But now the passing sight of that young man struck his heart with something which cut and burned at the same instant. Services are forgotten, ties are broken, the past is rejected; oh, the ingratitude of mankind! And still with what delight would he have ridden through the streets of the city on such a spring day in that carriage with rubber ties, bearing the persons within it on yielding cushions, with the soft movement of a cradle. With a still greater feeling of delight would he have conversed while going with someone who possessed the same habits, tastes, and relations which he had; with what vivid satisfaction would he halt before one of the best restaurants of that city to have an exquisite lunch, between walls decorated with taste, and amid sounds of joyfulness. But all those things which on a time were as cheap as good-morning, are now as remote and unattainable as the blue sky above him.

In his closely drawn coat, and bent over so much that his shoulders took the form of a half-circle; in his hat, from beneath which black hair was visible and a row of furrows above his dark brows, he gazed at the street which stretched along outside the paling, and in his fingers, covered with Danish gloves, he twirled the golden toy from habit. The

## The Argonauts

hat shone like satin above his head, and on the cigarette-case, which he twirled in his fingers, the sun-gleams were crossing one another.

The street beyond that paling lay before a square which was rather extensive; this square seemed dominated by two lofty buildings, before the ornamented fronts of which there was a great movement of people. Through the broad doors of these buildings a throng of men went in and came out, equipages stopped before them; on the steps which led up to them halted, advanced, decreased, and again increased a crowd of figures clad in black, noisy, gesticulating, occupied passionately in some work. No wonder! These were the bank and the exchange, which stood with opposing fronts, and, with their multitude of windows, seemed to gaze eye to eye at each other. Kranitski looked neither at these piles nor the throng of men circulating about them. He had never had anything in common with activity in those buildings. But all at once he bent forward a second time and fixed his eyes on a carriage which passed the paling, or rather he fixed them on the man sitting in it.

It was Aloysius Darvid who, on that sunny day, was in an open carriage drawn by a pair of large, costly horses, which, in light harness without mounting, stepped slowly, with grace and importance. On the box sat a coachman and footman, in high hats and immense fur collars; in the carriage, finished in sapphire damask, a man of not large stature, slender, with pale face, ruddy side-whiskers, and with the glitter of a golden spark in the glasses which covered his eyes. Slowly, with dignity, the carriage with muffled sound of rubber-bound wheels halted before the bank entrance. The footman sprang from the box, stood at the door, and taking a card from his master's hand hurried into the building. Five minutes had not passed when out came

## The Argonauts

two serious persons who approached the carriage hastily, and began to converse with the man sitting in it. Surely officials, even dignitaries of the bank, whom he had summoned by two words outlined on the card. To go to them, to ascend the high steps, he had not time perhaps, so they ran down those steps to him. They did not walk down, they ran, and now, with the most courteous smiles in the world and with raising of hats above their important heads, these men seemed to counsel with him about something, to indicate some point, to promise. While he, ever unchanged, perfectly polite though cold, with a shade of sarcasm on his lean face, rather listened than spoke, and with a golden spark in his glasses, against a background of bright sapphire damask, had the seeming of a demi-god.

In five minutes' time the conversation was over. Darvid inclined with befitting profoundness; the officers bowed much lower their hats above their heads. With the muffled sound of rubber tires, with the slow and important gait of the splendid horses, that carriage moved on, described a large circle and stopped at the long and broad steps leading up to the edifice opposite. Here the footman opened the carriage door; Darvid alighted and began to ascend the steps where a dense throng of men, dressed in black, opened before him as a wave opens to an oncoming vessel. That must be no common craft; for, along the wave of men, quivers passed as they pass through one living organism at the touch of an electric current. The opening throng formed eddies, whispered, was silent; a number of hands were raised toward heads, and hats or caps hung in the air; a multitude of faces were turned toward that one face, and fixed their eyes on it. These movements had in them an expression of timid curiosity, an expression which seemed almost humble. The most confident stepped forth from the throng with bared heads,

## The Argonauts

and with steps which were either too slow or too hurried, but never such steps as they made habitually. These men approached the newly arrived and spoke to him of something; they were doubtless inquiring, taking counsel, perhaps petitioning; for all those acts were expressed in their movements, and on their faces. Thus was formed something like that retinue of the élite who surround a demi-god, and between the two walls of people, along the splendid steps of the stairway they went up with him higher and higher to the entrance of the temple, and vanished there with him. The heads of the common crowd were covered with hats and caps now, but many eyes, unable to gaze on Phaeton himself, turned to his chariot, and were fixed for a long time yet on its sapphire-colored damask, which was warmed by the sun-rays, and on those two splendid animals which, standing there in trained fixedness, seemed like bronze steeds of the sun before the gates of that money mart.

Kranitski, sitting on the garden bench, had grown rigid in the posture described above—his mouth awry, his eyes gleaming. So this is what has happened! In a few weeks after the death of the hapless Cara he is active and triumphant; he hurls his lariat on the golden calf and captures new millions. A demi-god! A Titan! The king of markets! He sweeps forward in seven-league boots over roads, at the crossing-points of which are Americans with millions, they are millionnaires no longer, but masters of millions. He is the man who, as Baron Emil said, knows how to will.

Still, how small he seemed and devoid of desire at the hour when he stood near the corpse of his daughter, joined with the silent smoke of the censer, which rose like light mist in the air. How petty he appeared at that juncture, crushed, as it were, by some giant hand—not a demi-god in any sense, or a Titan, but rather an insect, pushing into

## The Argonauts

some narrow cranny to hide from a bird of prey. Kranitski had seen Darvid then, for, on hearing of the misfortune, no power on earth or in hell could have stopped him from running, from flying to the house where it had happened.

That misfortune had pierced his heart. And straightway he felt, also, those inward and other pains which for some time had attacked him without pity and more frequently; but, in spite of his pains, he ran on without a thought that he had been forbidden that house, or a thought of what might meet him within it. He entered, and by well-known ways went directly to the chambers of the lady. Happen what might, he must see, in such a terrible moment, that woman, that saint, that mild and noble being. She was surrounded by many; there was a throng of people about her, but he did not see who they were, nor did he think what they might say of him. Before his eyes was a mist which veiled all things in front of him, save the face of that woman so dreadfully changed and grown old recently; that woman who no longer had the bright aureole of pale, golden hair above her forehead, but on that forehead and across the whole width of it was the dark furrow of a deep wrinkle. Without seeing, or greeting a person, he walked up to her directly, and, dropping on his knees, pressed to his lips the hem of her mourning garment. He did this without the trace of a plan, without forethought; he did it through an impulse which threw him at the feet of the woman. That action came from his heart, and from his heart only. For never was anyone like her, he thought. Many a time he had had fortune with women. In life he had been loved, and had loved in various fashions, but as he had loved her, never had he loved woman.

He did not remember; he was unconseious of what happened after that; but it seemed that Irene seized in her

## The Argonauts

arms the loudly weeping lady; that Maryan was there also, and many other persons, who, going in and passing out with silent tread and low words, produced a sound something like the rustle of leaves when they are falling. In some corner of the chamber he sat down, or stood up, he cannot tell which, he only remembers that he was surrounded by the odor of alder-blossoms which filled the chamber, till, finally, he felt that it was late, that he had to go out just as had others. He could not be with that beloved being in her suffering; of all pains that was the most unendurable. But life contains sometimes such cruelties. Life at times is atrocious! He went once again to look at the "little one," he saw her, and with her the demi-god, in such a position that he thought: Here, too, is a man who is ended! At this point of meditation Kranitski rested his elbow on the arm of the bench, shaded his eyes with his palm, and placed before his imagination that wonderful sight which seemed a fable, a dream to him.

What luxury, what originality of thought and taste! What a mountain of gold was poured out there! The plan and the taste were seemingly Maryan's. The grand drawing-room had been turned into a grotto, which, from floor to ceiling, was covered with soft folds of white crape and muslin, meeting above in a gigantic rosette resembling the mystic four-leafed roses painted on Gothic church-windows, save that this one at which the wavy drapery met and hid walls and ceiling was as white and soft as if formed by the fantastic play of cloud substance. But everything in that chamber, the walls, the arch, the rosette, seemed made up of clouds and of snow, on which had fallen an immense rain of white flowers, white only. In garlands, woven together, or cast about without order by the movement of hands, they clung to the walls and the vault, covered the floor, were scattered



## The Argonauts

over everything, were visible everywhere, and seemed to have fallen out of every place. Aside from them and among them, there was nothing but abundance of light; stars, bunches, columns were formed of lights, burning in branch-holders and candlesticks. It is unknown where they were invented, so uncommon were these holders and candlesticks, so fantastic. They were so peculiar in style that it would seem as if they had been brought from the dream-world of an excited fancy to the world of existence. There was no color, no tinsel, no emblem of death, nothing in that sea of snowy whiteness save an avalanche of snow-covered flowers and the dazzling gleam of burning tapers, with the odor of lilies-of-the-valley, roses, alder-blossoms, hyacinths, to which was added incense of some kind, as peculiar as was everything in that chamber. This incense, burning it was unknown in what place, sent hither and thither through the air, from time to time, small grayish cloudlets of smoke amid the gleam of the lights and tinged by the gold of them. In that chamber were virginity, with an atmosphere of mysticism, inventiveness unwilling to recognize the impossible—a chapter of magic, a strophe of a poem, and in it, as a central point for all else, was the slender form of Cara on a lofty place, fallen asleep calmly, arrayed as in a bridal robe, with her delicate face, which, in the pale, golden hair, with a shade of whiteness barely discernible, emerged from the flood of snowy crape and flowers. In that flood of snowy white, in that gleaming brilliance of the tapers, in that richness of intoxicating odors, in that atmosphere of haze moving from the burning censer, Cara was sleeping calmly, with the smooth arches of her dark brows below the Grecian outline of her forehead; on her closed lips was a smile which was almost gladsome.

It must have been late at night when Kranitski rose from



## The Argonauts

his knees and found himself alone in that chamber. Outside the words and prayers of watchers were heard murmuring beyond the doors and the walls, but there the sleep of death seemed to reign alone. After a while, however, something rustled near one of the walls. Kranitski looked around and saw a man who seemed at first to be an undefined patch on the snowy background. After a few seconds he recognized Darvid's features in ruddy side-whiskers, but he strained his eyes rather long inquiring whether he was not mistaken. Neither sorrow nor despair, commonly roused by death in the living, but something still greater and beyond that was depicted in the look and the posture of Darvid. His eyes, usually so clear, so positive, so like glittering steel, had in them now an abyss of thought at the bottom of which terror was secreted, while the form of the man seemed shrunk and crushed down. Neither irony, nor energy, nor bold certainty of self was in it now. He looked smaller than usual, and in the manner of bending his head forward there was something of the vanquished. The soft folds at which he stood surrounded him in such a way that he seemed flattened and recalled definitely, like an insect in flight which was trying to push through a narrow crack to escape before something immense which was swooping down suddenly. He turned his eyes toward Kranitski, recognized the man, and casting an indifferent glance at him, gazed again in another direction at the enormous something. He had no feeling of hatred, or contempt, or offence. Kranitski on his part had none of those feelings either. He thought that various tales and dramas represent mortal enemies who, in moments like that, reach their hands to one another and are reconciled. Pathos is not truthful! It has no sufficient reason. What are men's quarrels or agreements in presence of—this? He looked

## The Argonauts

a little longer at the maiden sleeping under the shower of white blossoms, and whispered: "Death! yes, yes! death! eternal sleep!" then, with drooping head, he went forth from that grotto, which was snow-white and gleaming with lights. He was so broken that he dragged himself out of it rather than walked.

Now, on the bench of the garden, Kranitski raised his face from his palms and looked at the exchange. The porch with its broad steps was empty, but Darvid's carriage was there yet, showing a spot of gleaming sapphire in the sunny air, the horses stood in trained fixedness, like statues cast from bronze. Kranitski's lips were awry with distaste. With a bitterness to which his mild nature came rarely, he whispered:

"Labor! iron labor!"

With lips full of gall, not thinking now of straightening his shoulders or giving his steps an appearance of elasticity, he dragged along from street to street, halting sometimes for a moment before the gates of the grandest houses. Each one of these reminded him of something, of some brilliant or happy moment, of some fragment of the past. This one he had entered while going to one of the smaller or greater "stars of his existence;" out of that one he had gone when taking the ailing Count Alfred to Italy; through this one he had hurried daily to do some kindness for Prince Zeno; that one brought to him the memory of a certain ball, so brilliant that it bordered upon fairy-land. Now all these gates and those mansions are for him like that hall which guests have deserted, in which the lights are extinguished, and through which a man finds his way with a night-lamp—remembering, as he passes, a spot where had gleamed the naked shoulders of a beauty; or another, where the faces of joyous comrades had smiled at him; a third, where

## The Argonauts

had risen the odor of flowers, or the odor of roast pheasants.

At last, late in the afternoon, Mother Clemens heard a ring in the antechamber, and ran along the floor in her clattering old overshoes, hastening to answer the door-bell. On her broad shoulders was a barred kerchief, in her hand was a needle with a thick thread, and above her eyes, now growing dim, a second pair of eyes, which were glass, in spectacles raised to the woman's wrinkled forehead.

"Hm!" commenced she immediately, "I thought that thou hadst fastened for the day in some pleasant company; but, Arabian adventure! thou hast returned before evening. This is well, for guests have been here, and they will come again shortly."

"Guests?" inquired Kranitski, and his face cleared somewhat, but briefly, because Clemens snorted.

"Yes, one of them was very important. Be pleased with the honor! Berek Shyldman! He said that next week, as God is God, he would sell thy furniture."

Seeing, however, that Kranitski, after he had removed his coat, dragged his feet through the little drawing-room, and that red wrinkles came out above his brows, she grew mild and spoke in better humor:

"But thou mayst take delight in two other guests who came. Great dandies, and of thy company, though young enough to be thy sons."

"Who were they? who? who? Speak, mother!"

"How can I remember those Arabian names? But they left cards—wait, I'll bring them this minute—I put them in the kitchen."

She turned toward the kitchen, but right behind her, stepping almost on her heels went Kranitski, delighted and impatient, he almost snatched from her hand two visiting-

## The Argonauts

cards, on which he read the names: Maryan Darvid and Baron Emil Blauendorf.

"Ah!" cried he, "those dear children! The baron has returned then! And his first thought after returning was of me! What a heart! I go; I run!"

And, indeed, he ran to the door of the antechamber, radiant, rejuvenated, but Mother Clemens stood in his way, squaring out her shoulders in the checkered kerchief.

"Whither art thou going? What for? Is it to meet them on the steps, or at the gate? They said that they would come again in an hour. To each other they said that they would go to see the Nazarene——"

"What Nazarene?" asked Kranitski, with astonishment. "What Nazarene?"

"But how should I know what Nazarene? It may be an image of the Lord Jesus of Nazareth. They only said that they would go to look at it, and come back here."

"Come back," repeated Kranitski, "that is well. We shall have a talk—it is so long since I have had a talk with anyone—and I shall see Maryan, the dear, dear boy!"

Kranitski rubbed his hands; he walked with springy step, and erect shoulders, through the little drawing-room, but not even delight could round his cheeks, which had dropped during recent days somewhat; neither could it freshen the yellow tint on them. Mother Clemens halted in the middle of the room and followed him with her two pair of eyes.

"See, my lords! He is as if born again, as if called back to life!"

He stopped confused before her.

"Knowest what? Let mother run for a *pâté de foie gras*, and a bottle of liqueur."

Mother Clemens dropped back to the wall.

## The Argonauts

“Jesus of Nazareth! Hast thou gone mad, Tulek? Berek Shyldman—thy furniture——”

“What do I care for Berek Shyldman! What do I care for furniture!” cried Kranitski, “when those noble hearts remember me——”

“Hearts have no stomachs; there is no need of stuffing something into them the first minute.”

“What does mother know? Mother is an honest woman, but her level is earth to earth—she only thinks of this cursed money!”

“But is *pâté de foie gras* holy? Arabian adventure!”

Both voices were raised somewhat. Kranitski threw himself on the sofa, pressed his right side with his palm, groaned. Then Clemens turned her face toward him; she had grown mild and seemed frightened.

“Well, has pain caught thee?”

It was clear that he was suffering. An old affliction of the liver, and something of the heart in addition. Mother Clemens approached the sofa in her clattering overshoes.

“Well, do not excite thyself. What is to be done? How much money will that Arabian *pâté* cost?”

“And the liqueur!” put in Kranitski.

When he had grown calm he explained that the baron was fond of liqueur, and that Maryan was wild for *pâté* and black coffee.

“Let mother prepare black coffee—thou knowest how to do it perfectly.”

“What more!” snorted she. “Perhaps it would be well to take the panes from the windows, and throw the stove down?”

Kranitski spread out his arms.

“Why speak of the window-panes and the stove? What meaning can the stove and the glass have? There is no com-

## The Argonauts

parison between black coffee and window-panes, or the stove. Mother irritates me."

Again his face changed and he groaned; the old woman surrendered, but the question of money remained. Kranitski took a bill out of his pocketbook, held it between two fingers, and thought. This is too small. That kind of liqueur which the baron drinks is very expensive. Vexation was evident on his face. Clemens spoke up:

"Well, stop thinking, for if thou hast not a rouble thou wilt not think out one in a hundred years. Be calm. Only write all on a card for me; I will go and buy what is needed."

Kranitski struggled on the sofa.

"With what money wilt thou buy it, mother?"

But she was already in the doorway of the neighboring room, and gave no answer.

"Is it with thy own?" cried Kranitski, "surely with thy own! I know that mother is spending her capital this good while——"

She came back with the checkered kerchief over her head, without spectacles, and ready for the errand.

"Well, what if I do spend it? Hast thou not Lipovka? Thou hast, and what I lend thou wilt return. Oi, oi! I stand with one foot in the grave, and should I fight about a rouble when thou art in need of it?"

Kranitski raised his hands and his eyes:

"What a heart!" whispered he; "what attachment! No one can equal the old servants of our ancient families!"

After a few minutes steps were heard in the antechamber of people coming in, and the fresh voice of a man cried:

"May one see the master of this place?"

Kranitski ran to the antechamber.

"Of course, my dears! You make me happy, altogether happy!"

## The Argonauts

And indeed he had the face of a man made happy, and also filled with emotion; for, taking his place in one of the armchairs opposite Maryan, who sat in another, he listened to the baron's narrative, which gave details of his recent expedition.

Baron Emil was uncommonly vivacious, but at the same time he feigned to be more nervous and excited than usual. He did not sit down for one instant.

"*Merci, merci!*" said he to the master of the house who indicated a chair to him; "I am in such a condition, that really, I cannot sit in one place. Something within me is toiling, and crying, and biting. I am full of trembling of hopes, and of anger—" A brick-colored rosy blush appeared on his yellow cheeks; as usual, he spoke through his nose and through his teeth, but more quickly than common. While walking through the drawing-room he said, that in smaller and greater country residences which he had visited he had found a few remnants of former wealth, specimens of art, and of ornamental industry, which were of considerable, and sometimes even of high, value. A multitude of these rich things had been acquired by the English, who had circled about through the country more than once in pursuit of them; but much remained yet, and the only need was to inquire, seek, examine, and it was possible to find real treasures, even, often most unexpectedly. He halted before Maryan.

"I say this because who, for example, could hope or expect to find in possession of a schoolmaster, a teacher of geography, an absolute Arcadian, a picture by Steinle hung behind a door, smoked befouled by flies—an undoubted, a genuine Steinle—Edward Steinle——"

"But is it undoubted?" interrupted Maryan; "once more I turn thy attention to certain traits which seem to speak in favor of Kupelweiser."



## The Argonauts

“What, Kupelweiser!” cried the baron, walking still more quickly through the drawing-room. “No Kupelweiser, my dear; not a shadow of a Kupelweiser. Kupelweiser, though the teacher of Steinle was considerably inferior to him in drawing—that firmness and elegance of outline, that harmony of composition, that piety, that genuine compunction which is dominant in the faces of the saints—that is Steinle, the purest Steinle, undoubted Steinle, whose collection of cartoons in Frankfort——”

“Was Steinle, for I do not recollect, pre-Raphaelite?” put in Kranitski timidly, somewhat ashamed of his ignorance.

“Yes, if you like,” answered the baron, “we may reckon among the pre-Raphaelites the German school of Nazarenes. But this school is distinct.”

“Then surely you examined this Steinle to-day, my dears, before you came to me?”

“Yes, we heard of it by chance; we went to examine it, and imagine, we found this pearl in the possession of an Arcadian who has neither a conception, nor the shadow of a conception of the Nazarenes, or who Steinle——”

“But perhaps we should pardon him,” laughed Maryan, “for the Germans themselves know almost nothing of Steinle, who fell into disfavor among his successors.”

“On the contrary!” exclaimed the baron, “I beg pardon, my dear, real judges always value him highly, and he is greatly sought for by museums. His cartoons when placed at the side of Overbeck’s *Triumph of Religion in Art* lose nothing; on the contrary, that compunction distinguishes his figures.”

“But thou canst not compare him with Overbeck!” said Maryan, with indignation.

“I can, I can! I make him equal to Overbeck; and I consider him superior to Führich and Veit——”

## The Argonauts

"I will give thee Veit, but as to Overbeck, that marvellous melancholy which fills the eyes of his women——"

"It is earthly, earthly, rather than that perfect expression from beyond which is dominant in Steinle's figures. In this regard Steinle is the only man whom we may compare with Fra Angelico——"

"I would rather compare him with Lippo-Mani."

"Perhaps," said the baron, half agreeing, "as Führich, whenever I look at him, reminds me of Buffalmaco."

"And me, of Piero di Cosimo."

"No, no," objected the baron, "Piero di Cosimo in coloring is different from Führich and Buffalmaco."

"I can compare Buffalmaco, to-day, with Rossetti alone."

In this manner they conversed some time longer of the Italian painters of the epoch preceding Raphael, and of their modern followers. At times disputing slightly; at times growing enthusiastic in company, till they agreed in one opinion; namely, that the greatest master of painting, whom it was impossible to compare with anyone among contemporaries, was Dante Gabriel Rossetti, an Englishman, but that the school of German Nazarenes, to which Overbeck, Steinle, Führich, and others belonged, was, in spite of certain inequalities and weaknesses, altogether pure *Quattrocento*.

"Yes, *Quattrocento*," finished the baron; "who knows even if they are not purer, more perfect *Quattrocento* than Rossetti and Morris."

Kranitski listened, spoke rarely, while something within him began to weep. He, too, loved art, but how far was he now from its loftiest caprices. How much would he give if those dear boys there, those noble hearts, would speak of something else to him, of something nearer. After a time he remarked with a smile to which he brought himself with effort:

## The Argonauts

“Then you have the first parts of that golden fleece which you are to bear beyond the sea?”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the baron, “the golden fleece! splendidly said! In truth, we shear the sheep, or, if you like, the shepherds, for you cannot imagine what a rheumatism of thought in this matter prevails throughout the country. No man knows the value of what he has; no man knows what he possesses. There is no conception of art; no æsthetic knowledge. In my journey I felt as if wandering through ancient Scythia. All are related to me, or are old neighbors of my parents; they greeted me with open arms. Kisses with saliva, and chops cooked in buckwheat-grits! Their rooms are filled with progeny, who look as though they might grow up without trousers. The parents we may almost call, now, the shirtless. From this cause comes a genuine fury of turning all things to money. My proposition brought to their eyes tears of gratitude. They saw in me a saviour. Had I wished, I might have won the glory of a patriot bringing salvation to his countrymen. But glory is a painted pot. I am not a man to be covered with labels. I buy cheap to sell dear, that is my game. And, though I told them this, they kissed me. I filled their mouths, which were suffering from that hunger which goes before harvest. They opened old cupboards before me, also storehouses; one man even opened a chapel in which I found church-cloths of incomparable antiquity. I suspect that one of these is of Flemish make, and reaches back to Robert the Pious, just such a one did I see in the museum at Cluny. Finally, a number of images; some girdles and brocades; some old weapons, which would befit John of Dresden very well; this is my booty. Here we have discovered one Overbeck and one Steinle; but Maryan, during my absence, found, somewhere, Saxon porcelain, of incredible

## The Argonauts

age, in perfect preservation. But this is only the beginning. There will be a whole harvest of these things, a whole harvest!"

"A golden fleece!" whispered Kranitski.

He grew more and more gloomy, and felt in his right side a pain which was well-nigh unendurable. The tone in which the baron gave account of his journey in regions about his birthplace, roused almost instinctive disgust in Kranitski. He looked at Maryan. Was he the same also? After a while he asked:

"Has the American project crystallized thoroughly? Is it settled? Are you going to America surely?"

"It has crystallized this far," answered Maryan, "that I start no later than to-morrow. Emil will remain here some weeks yet. I, to become acquainted with the people and the country, leave here to-morrow."

Kranitski straightened himself and sat there dumb for a time, with fixed look, then he repeated:

"To-morrow?"

"Absolutely," confirmed Maryan; and, when the baron sat down after long walking, he rose, and began in turn to walk through the drawing-room, declaring that he had come to-day purposely to take farewell of Kranitski.

"I could not go without taking farewell of my good, old man," said he.

It may be that he would not have gone so soon had not certain details made his life impossible. One of these details was, that the week before his father had withdrawn the allowance paid up to that time. A certain period had ended just a week earlier, and, through commands from above, the treasury had withheld payment.

In speaking of this Maryan grew red in the face; the vein in his forehead swelled like a blue cord; his eyes glittered

## The Argonauts

brightly. He was wounded to his innermost heart by the last conversation which he had had with his father. It was brief, but decisive; he had told it to Kranitski. From the narrative it was possible to divine that Darvid had shown at first an inclination to milden the demands on his son, but afterward despotic habits and practical views had won the victory. He demanded that in one of the factories belonging to him, Maryan should begin a course of self-restraint, obedience, and labor.

“Our two individualities,” said Maryan, “came into collision, and sprang back in a state of complete inviolability—not the least dint was made on him or on me. Our wills remained unbroken. He, of course, is a man with a mighty will. It seemed at first that the death of that poor little Cara crushed him, but he straightened quickly, and now again he is going through genuine orgies of his iron-labor. I admire that integrity of will in him, and I confess that it is a power of the highest quality; but I have no thought of abdicating my own personality because my father, with all his undoubted endowments, has a head badly ventilated. It may be that one of my great-grandfathers said, that if one child gave itself as food to worms, another should give itself to be crushed by its father’s chariot. But I am not my own great-grandfather, and I know that every yielding of one’s self to be tormented by Pavel to amuse Gavel is a painted pot.”

“It is a darned sock!” added the baron.

Another reason why Maryan had to leave the city without delay was the impression produced on him by the death of that poor little girl. But he did not admit that so many atavistic instincts were at work in him. He was a man of the new style, but he experienced now the spiritual condition of his great-grandfather, which affected him so that,

## The Argonauts

like Maeterlinck's Hjalmar, he wished to throw handfuls of earth at night-owls. The death of that little one, and all that was happening and going on in the house, had made his soul pale from weakness. He understood now Maeterlinck's expression, to sink to the very eyelids in sorrow. When that Intruder, who is ever mowing grass beneath life's windows, came for that little girl, Maryan had the question in mind continually: "Why do the lamps go out?" Now, like Hjalmar in "Princess Malenia," he feels every moment like exclaiming: Someone is weeping here near us! He had moments in which such nervous impotence attacked him that he did not feel capable of stirring a finger, or moving an eyelid. Accompanying this condition was a perfect understanding that all sentimental family-tenderness is a painted pot. It is known, of course, that in the world a multitude of maidens are always dying; that each life is a gate before which grave-diggers are waiting; and that this does not furnish the slightest reason why those, under whose window the Intruder has not begun to mow grass yet, should have pale and sickly souls.

He must flee from expiring lamps, and night-owls; from nervous impotence and spleen of spirit; he must rush out for new contacts and horizons; for new spaces, where there are fresh worlds which are free from the fifty defilements of past centuries.

He concluded and took a seat. Kranitski had tears in his eyes, and after a rather long silence, he added:

"Thou art going away I see!"

And then, with hesitating voice, he inquired:

"Thou hast said: 'that which is happening and going on in the house.' What is going on there?"

To this the baron answered, with growing blushes:

"How? Do you not know that Pani Darvid and Panna Irene set out in a few days—for a retreat?"

## The Argonauts

"To Krynichna," said Maryan, completing the information. "Father has made Irene the owner of Krynichna, and they are going there."

Kranitski grew very pale, and only after great red spots had appeared above his eyes did he look at the baron, and begin:

"Then——"

"Then," added the baron, quickly, "everything is ended between Panna Irene and me. I am glad, for how could my bite and her idyl agree? That would have been like the odor of ether on a sunny day in Maeterlinck's hot-houses. Naturally, I represent the ether, and Panna Irene the sunny day."

The smile with which he said this grew ever more jeering and malicious.

"But I know not how they will succeed in the retreat. In spite of her idyl Panna Irene has much in her, very much of the cry of life, of that beautiful impulse toward—what Ruysbrook called love in action, toward ecstatic impressions, and with such a disposition, as far as my skill extends in this matter, it is difficult to halt at the mere spectacle of sparrows making love outside one's window——"

"A truce to malicious phrases, Emil," interrupted Maryan. "Thou art not threatened with the fate of Werther because my sister has broken with thee——"

"Of course not!" laughed the baron.

And Maryan added quickly:

"And thou shouldst even offer up to her that painted pot, called gratitude, because she has not closed to thee the road to some daughter of a multi-millionnaire Yankee. America possesses men of 'iron toil,' whose daughters are far richer than the daughters—alas! than the only daughter of my father."



## The Argonauts

"Perhaps! perhaps!" agreed the baron; "the daughters of the richest American fathers pay very high prices for European titles. In this way, or another, or both together, I may make a colossal fortune. Yes, wealth is a door before which the heralds of life have their station—I am not a man pasted over with labels. I confess that this perspective entices me; what I possess now is merely a little crumb for my hunger of life. I shall leave here greedy for new sensations and new profits—eager for love in action and for gain."

After a moment's silence Kranitski whispered:

"They are going!"

Then glancing along the faces of the two young men, he added:

"You are going!"

"Yes," said the baron, "and therefore we make a certain proposition. Perhaps you would take upon yourself to be one of our agents."

He presented in detail a plan of the enterprise—to carry out this there would be agents disposed through the whole country to discover and purchase.

"We need æsthetic persons, a company of developed men, and it is difficult, very difficult to find them. In this country sterility reigns throughout the whole region of gray matter in the brain—it is sterility in the great gray substance—if you wish——"

Kranitski was silent. It was not long since he had desired this position, perhaps, and something which might attach him to people and to life. But now—during this discourse with his two friends—an increasing disgust had seized hold of him. The sarcasm of the baron about shirtless parents who kissed him with lips suffering from hunger before harvest pierced his heart cruelly. In his mind hovered the

## The Argonauts

words "departure, death!" and before his imagination rose the vision of a flock of birds flying in every direction. To buy cheap to sell dear! That was vile! At the same time he felt that the pains in his side and his heart had grown keener, and a feeling of faintness possessed him. After a moment's thought, he said:

"No, my dear friends; it seems that I shall not be able to serve you. I am sick—I am growing old—besides, my dears, I must tell you openly——"

He hesitated, and took from the table his gold case, which he had opened before the guests. He meditated a moment, and then said:

"Your undertaking has sides which wound my sense of propriety somewhat. This business will always be buying in a temple, even in temples, I might say, for art is sacred, and so is the fatherland. You are both too clever to require explanation on this point. The loneliness in which I shall be when you are gone frightens and pains me—pains me immensely, but I am forced to say that I shall not be with you in this matter; no, decidedly, I shall not be of your company."

By nature Kranitski was averse to disputes, and for various reasons unused to them, hence he had begun to speak with hesitation and dislike; but afterward he rested his shoulder against the arm of the sofa, and with head somewhat raised, twirling the cigarette-case in his hand, he had the look of a great lord, especially if compared with the baron, who always seemed somewhat like a mosquito preparing to bite. And this time he began with a sneering smile:

"You are always painted in the color of romantic poetry of sacred memory. While you were speaking I seemed to be listening to 'a postillion, playing under the windows of incurable patients,' and——"

## The Argonauts

But Maryan rose from his armchair, and broke in:

“As for me, I respect individuality; and since that of our beloved Pan Arthur is developed in his way, we have no right to insist on attacking him with ridicule. To be ridiculous proves nothing. ‘Thou art ridiculous,’ is no argument. I may be ridiculous in the eyes of another man, though right in my own. But a truce to discussion; I remind thee, Emil, of our porcelain——”

“Yes, yes!” replied the baron, and he rose also. “We must take farewell of our beloved friend here——”

At that moment, through the open door of the sleeping-room, entered Mother Clemens with a great tray. Since she had gratified her favorite she wished to do it in the best manner possible. On her head was a cap as white as snow; the clattering overshoes were no longer on her feet; and a checkered kerchief was arranged neatly, even with elegance, across her bosom. On the tray were small glasses, a bottle of liqueur, a *pâté de foie gras*, and three cups from which rose the excellent odor of coffee. All this she placed on a table before the sofa, and left the little drawing-room with gloomy eye, but firm foot.

Kranitski sprang up from the sofa.

“My dearest friends, I beg you—take a glass of liqueur, that which thou lovest, baron—Maryan, a little of the *pâté de foie gras*——”

But they touched their watches simultaneously.

“No, no!” began the baron, refusing, “we have only three minutes left.”

“We lunched at Borel’s, who, as my father says, gives us Lucullus feasts.”

Kranitski did not cease to urge them. Certain habits or instincts of a noble brightened his eyes, and shaped his arms in gestures of entreaty. But they resisted. In five minutes

## The Argonauts

they must be in that apparently wretched antiquarian shop, where Maryan had discovered the amazing porcelain. The baron, giving his hand to Kranitski in parting, said:

"We shall see each other again. You will visit me. I do not leave for a number of weeks—I doubt if this porcelain comes from Meissen as Maryan insists. In what year was the factory in Meissen?"

"In 1709," answered Maryan, and to Kranitski he said:

"Adieu, my good friend, adieu; be well, and write to me sometimes. Thou wilt find the address with Emil."

He turned to the door; Kranitski held him by the hand, however, and looked into his face with eyes which were mist-covered.

"Then it has come to this; for long years! It may be forever!"

"Well, well! See, thou art growing tender," began Maryan, but he stopped, and over his rosy face passed something like a shade of feeling.

"Well, my old man, embrace me!"

And when Kranitski had held him long in his arms, he said:

"*La! La!* leave regrets! Some ancient poet has told us that man is a shadow that is dreaming of shadows. We have been dreaming, my good friend. The only cure is to jest at every thing, come what may!"

With these words, Maryan went to the anteroom and put on his overcoat; meanwhile, the baron said:

"That cannot have come from Meissen, nor be of the year 1709. That is much more recent. It comes from the Ilmenau factory——"

"How so? Say rather that it comes from Frankenthal?"

The baron, looking around from behind his cane, remarked:

## The Argonauts

“It is too smooth and shining for such an old date.”

Maryan answered, with his hand on the lock:

“It is polished with agate.”

And he went out. But the baron, after crossing the threshold, began:

“And as to the ruddy-brownish biscuit——”

The door closed; the voices ceased. Kranitski stood some time in the antechamber, then he turned toward the little drawing-room, and whispered:

“‘Polished with agate’—‘Biscuit,’ and those are their last words!”

Some minutes later, in a Turkish dressing-gown with patched lining and mended sleeves, Kranitski lay on his long chair, opposite his collection of pipes, and, in deep thought, twirled his golden cigarette-case. In vain did Mother Clemens urge him to eat a little of that Arabian pâté and drink a glass of liqueur; he tried, but could swallow nothing. Sorrow had closed his throat; he was sunk in reminiscences. He felt with perfect tangibleness that breath of cold air which was blowing around him. In this manner did Time blow on the man—Time, that merciless jester, who had always circled about playing various pranks on him; but Kranitski had never looked into the face of that jester, with attention. Occasionally, sorrow and grief had come to him in company with the trickster, but they were transient, not of the kind which go into the depth of the heart, but such as slip along over the surface. He grew gloomy; was sorry for having lost someone, or having missed something, and passed on with springy, lightly swaying gait, with his long continued youth, humming some fashionable ditty; or, with tender smile on his lips, living easily and joyously in endless pursuit of agreeable trifles. But, now, he has the first look at Time, face to face and near by. The current

## The Argonauts

has borne away; the abyss has swallowed; people, houses, relations, feelings, and nothing comes back from them but one word in a ceaseless murmur: "Gone! gone! gone!" That which is ended to-day calls to the man's mind all things that have been. That past is to him something in the form of a mighty grave, or rather a catacomb, composed of a host of graves, through the openings of which are visible the absent; not only those snatched away by death, but also those gone through separation, removal, oblivion. Dead were faces once dear; faded were moments once precious; portions of life had dropped into dust; and Time, standing before the catacomb, his cheeks swollen in jeering, puffs his cold breath of the grave on that man who is calling up the past.

Kranitski wrapped himself closely in his dressing-gown; hung his head so low that the bald spot, whitening on his crown, became visible; his lower lip dropped; red furrows came out above his black brow. Mother Clemens stood in the kitchen doorway.

"Wilt thou eat dinner now?" inquired she.

He made no answer. She withdrew, but returned in half an hour bringing a cup of black coffee.

"Drink," said she, "perhaps thou wilt grow cheerful, and I will tell the news from Lipovka."

She pushed a small table to the long chair, sat down with hands on her knees, and with immense attention in the expression of her quick and shining eyes, fell to repeating the substance of a letter just received from her godson, the tenant of Lipovka. He wrote that he had repaired the dwelling; that he was living himself in a building outside; that he had put the place in order most neatly, as if for the arrival of the owner. The furniture was the same as in the time of the former master; though old, it was sound yet, and

## The Argonauts

beautiful, because repaired and cleaned. The garden was larger than of old, for many fruit-trees had been added. The bees, brought in recently, were thriving. It was quiet there; calm, green in summer; white in winter; not as in that cursed city of throngs and shouting——”

She laughed.

“And there is no Berek Shyldman there.”

Then she added:

“Be at rest about debts. Thou wilt sell thy pipes and cupids, and if they do not bring enough, I will give all my own things. All that I have I will give, and I will drag thee out of this hell. Oh, Arabian adventure! If this lasts longer, thou wilt lose the last of thy health; thou wilt go deeper in debt, and die in a hospital. Tulek, dost thou hear what I say? Why not answer?”

And since he made no answer even then, she continued:

“But rememberest thou that Lipovka grove beyond the yard? It is there yet. Stefan has not cut it down; God forbid! And dost thou remember how beautifully the sun sets behind that grove?”

When the sun had gone down in the world it began to grow dark in Kranitski's room. And Mother Clemens continued in the thickening twilight:

“And rememberest thou how quiet the evenings are there? In summer, the nightingales sing; in autumn, the bagpipes play; in winter, God's winds rush outside the wall and roar; but, inside, it is honest, and quiet, and safe.”



## CHAPTER X

WHAT Maryan had told Kranitski about Darvid was true. The man was engaged in real orgies of labor. His assistants and associates were bending beneath it, and losing breath; he seemed more untiring than ever: Counsels, meetings, accounts, balances, correspondence, discussions with functionaries of the government, of finance, and of industries, banks, bureaus, exchanges, auctions, etc. And in all this appeared order, sequence, punctuality, logic, lending to the course of these gigantic interests the seeming of a machine with multitudes of wheels moved by a force elemental, invincible. For even those who had known him longest and most intimately, Darvid had become this time a surprise; he had surpassed himself. The number of men was continually increasing who began to look on him as on a rare phenomenon of nature. Whence did the man get such uncommon mental and physical vigor? From mid-day till hours which were far beyond midnight he was unceasingly active. When has he time to sleep and take rest? What is he seeking to reach? What will he reach? This last question brought out before the imagination of men certain summits of financial might, to be reared to such dizzy heights for the first time in the history of the country. A giant of mentality and energy. Some said: He is superhuman.

But in the immense number of men connected with Darvid by a net of most varied relations there were some to whom he seemed a curious enigma, representing a certain

## The Argonauts

inveterate struggle, the motives of which rested on the mysterious bases of his being. That hurling of himself with greater force than at any time hitherto into the whirl of occupations and business; that exertion to the remotest limits of the possible, directed toward one object of thought and energy, seemed to penetrating eyes, not merely a thirst for acquisition and profit, but a desperate conflict with something undiscovered and invisible. At that moment of his life it seemed to some that Darvid was like a man running straight forward and with all his might, because he felt that were he to halt, something awful would seize him. Others said, that he called to mind a man into whose ear some buzzing insect had crept, and who was hiding in a factory filled with uproar which was to drown the unendurable buzzing of the insect.

The truth was, that Darvid was building at that time, and with iron labor, a wall between himself and the giantess whom, for the first time in life, he had seen face to face, and very closely. It was clear enough that he had always known, not merely of her existence, but of this, that there was no power in the world more familiar than that giantess; still, this knowledge of his had been in a comatose condition, something separated altogether from the every-day substance of life, and touching which there had never been any need of thinking. Someone dies—a certain acquaintance; a comrade in amusement; a famous, or unknown power in the world—what do people say? A pity that he is gone! or, no help for it! Well, what influence can the disappearance of that man exercise on a given sphere of human action; on the course of men's relations and interests? Life, like a rushing river, tears all living men forward, and behind them, ever more distant, remains that misty region, which is filled with the vanished and forgotten. Who are

## The Argonauts

they who, at any time, think of that misty region, and look at the face of the giantess who reigns in it? Priests, perhaps, devotees it may be; a few poets at times; or people who sail on a slow and sad stream in life. Darvid had never had time for such thoughts. The stream which bore him on was rushing and roaring, glittering and turbulent.

But the giantess, because of her power, sprang over all golden mountains—and came! He was thinking of this at the moment when Kranitski saw him standing at the wall and squeezing into its snowy drapery, just as a frightened insect might squeeze itself into a cranny. That was a cranny in one more of his golden mountains. In the great city, people had spoken with amazement of the cost, well-nigh fabulous, of that last chamber of the millionaire's little daughter. He had means to do that and much more. What are those means to him? He had vanquished enormously great things in life, and he had immense power at that moment. But of what use is that power to him, since something has come which he cannot overthrow; something against which he can do nothing, and which has struck him doubly—struck his heart with pain, and his head with anxiety? What virtue is there in power which cannot shield a man from suffering? And even suffering is not important, since man can battle with it; but to shield against annihilation! That, at which he was looking then so nearly, was a sudden and merciless annihilation of life, blooming in all its charm and with great fulness. Something out of the air, something out of space, and from beyond boundaries attainable by human thought, had rushed in and trampled down that life fresh and beautiful. A power invincible—not to be bribed by wealth, persuaded by reason, or vanquished by energy. A mysterious power—the beginning and object of which were unknown, which had flown in on silent wings

## The Argonauts

and swept from the earth everything that it wished to take; and, against this, there were no means of resistance, or rescue. It seemed to him that the gloomy rustle of giant wings was filling that snowy chamber of the dead from edge to edge; and, for the first time in life, he felt things beyond mankind and the senses. His breast, which had breathed with pride; his head, which held one faith, the might of reason, and that which reason can accomplish, were struck now by an incomprehensible secret, which roused in him for the first time a feeling of his own inconceivable insignificance. He felt as small as an earth-worm must feel when on the grass along which it is crawling—the shadow of a vulture falls as it sweeps through the azure sky—and as the worm hides in the crack of a stone, so he sank into the snowy folds of crape and muslin which veiled the walls of that chamber. He felt as weak as if he were not a man of strong will and splendid labor, but a little child which is unable to push aside with its tiny fingers the terror which is standing out in front of it. With his shoulders and one half of his head sunk in the snowy folds, with his glance fixed on the sleeping face of Cara, which was visible among the white flowers, he said to her, mentally: “I can do nothing, nothing for thee, little one! I can do much, almost anything; but for thee I can do nothing!” Slender, grayish bits of smoke passed above her sleeping face, and, impelled by invisible movements of air, stretched in waving threads from her to him. Just at that moment he saw Kranitski come from an inner apartment of the house and kneel at the steps strewn with flowers. He looked; he recognized the man, and felt none of those emotions which his name alone had roused in him previously. What were human anger, hatred, disagreement in presence of that immense something into whose face he was gazing at that moment? What could Kranitski, hitherto hateful to

## The Argonauts

Darvid, be to him now, when he said to himself: "I know not; I understand not; it is impossible to comprehend this; and still it is real; since I—I can do nothing for thee, my little daughter."

But this was not the only discovery which he was to make on that occasion. He knew not how many hours he had passed in that chamber, but he saw the dawn, which drew a blue lining beyond the snowy folds which covered the windows, and then he saw the sun which flooded it with molten gold; he heard clocks striking a number of times in a chamber; one of these clocks was bass, and announced the hours slowly somewhere behind him, while another before him answered in a thinner and more hurried voice, till, all at once, beyond the closed doors, in one of the drawing-rooms, music was heard. Darvid knew what the meaning of that was: another golden mountain which he had reared for the "little one."

Much gold had been poured out in bringing those voices, the chorus of which raised a hymn of prayer and sorrow above his dead daughter. But previously the door was opened, and the white chamber was half filled with the highest of the most brilliant society in that city, showing signs of profound respect and sympathy. Prince Zeno escorted Malvina Darvid, who was all in tears and black crape. Mar-yan brought in the princess. Irene entered, leaning on the arm of a young prince, celebrated for beauty; next came stars of these three powers: birth, money, and reputation. They were not many, since summits are always few in number; slight sounds were heard of bringing, giving, and moving chairs; there were whispers and the rustle of silk garments.

Black silks, laces, and crape; the black dress of men mixed with glittering white; hands folded sadly on knees, or

## The Argonauts

crossed on breasts, with seriousness; faces sunk in thought—solemn stillness. Meanwhile, out of silence in the adjoining chamber, to the accompaniment of instrumental music, rose a grand funeral hymn, given by a chorus of the most famous artists in the city. The solemnity of the mourning, with its character of high life and unusualness, roused admiration for the man who had given such magnificent homage to his departed daughter. From out the mountain of gold gushed a fountain of enchanting music, on which that child sailed away beyond the boundaries of earthly existence.

Darvid did not greet those who entered; and, for the first time in life, perhaps, failed to meet the demands of society; they also, respecting a frame of mind which they divined in him, troubled the man in no way. He remained resting against the wall, and, from a distance, resembled a silhouette outlined on it darkly, as on a background. He looked on the brilliant assembly, from which he was separated by half the chamber, and felt that he was divided from those people by a space as great as if they were at one end of the world and he at the other end. Those shadows there whose names he knew, but who were nothing to him, and he nothing to them. They might exist, or not; that was all one to Darvid. Why had they come? Why were they there? Never mind, he knew only this, that they did not exist for him, as he did not for them. He was struck by the feeling of an immense vacuum, which divided him from men. This vacuum was something like a space which the eye could not take in, a space with two edges, on one of which he was found, and they on the other. They were by themselves, he was by himself.

The singing of the chorus rose in power, in thunders, then became like nightingale voices heard in space, with



## The Argonauts

notes clear and resonant. Invisible movements of air passed along the crapes, and the immense number of tapers, causing the flames on them to quiver.

Darvid had not paid attention to music; he had never had time to learn and to love it; but he felt that those tones were passing into his vitals, moving the secret strata of his being, and bringing them into movements unknown to him till that moment. He looked at Cara's face, rising up among the white blossoms, and he thought, or rather felt that, while those others seemed removed by boundless space, she alone was very near to him. "Mine!" he whispered. She alone. He did not know precisely how that could happen, but mentally he placed that little head with golden hair upon his shoulders, and said to it:

"Let us flee, little one! Thou didst ask me once what those people were to me. Now I will tell thee that they are nothing. I do not need them; they are strangers to me; with me they have no relations whatever; thou alone art needful to me; thou alone, such a sunray as I once saw on a journey and forgot, bright and warm. Thou alone art mine! Let us go; let us flee together from all and from everyone, for everything and all people are nothing to you and me; they are strange, and distant.

Here he remembered that never and nowhere would he be able to go with her, or to flee with her. He was joint possessor of a number of railroads; he had the power to employ for himself alone a number of trains passing over those roads; in the East, on a gigantic river, his own vessels were sailing, in clouds of steam; in one capital and another, and in this great city, swarms of people inhabited his houses—still he could not take that sleeping girl by land or by water, to any city, or to any house. To his eyes, which were raised toward her, a biting moisture began to come, and



## The Argonauts

gathered into drops, a number of which flowed down his cheeks, and were shaken in every direction by quiverings of the skin.

But at that moment appeared on his lips the smile, which, as people said, was bristling with pin-points.

“What is this? Is it exaltation?”

He discovered exaltation in himself. A few days before, nay, down to that very night, he would have laughed at the supposition that in him it could darken judgment and clear vision. He thought, however, that a man is at times to himself the most marvellous of all surprises. Under various influences forces spring up in him, the presence of which he is farthest from suspecting. Darvid discovered, now in himself, the thing most unexpected: exaltation. The habit of a life-time; that which he had always considered as an unshaken conviction, rose now with loud laughter at itself. Will he begin now as a poet to write a threnody over his dead daughter, or like a monk yield himself to thoughts about death? Misery! Earlier, that word had occurred more than once to him, but only now does it career through his head freely. Still, he will not let exaltation master him. He must stand erect and look at things soberly.

He straightened himself; removed his shoulders from the wall; calmed his face and glance; by strength of will brought a greeting smile to his lips; and moved toward his guests. The moment the hymn stopped he gave his hand to those present, in very polite welcome, and thanked them with a few, but pleasant phrases. This was the beginning of one of those herculean struggles, the like of which he had fought many times in the past. This, in its farther course, had an orgie of labor, which he continued for a number of weeks, and which roused admiration, or curiosity, in every on-looker.

## The Argonauts

One day, between his return from the city and the hour of reception, he was standing in the blue drawing-room at the window, thinking: What that peculiar movement was which on returning from the city he noted while walking up the stairway. Porters were bearing out articles of some sort, which he did not examine, but which seemed to him pictures, and other things also. Was Maryan leaving the house? Perhaps. It was impossible to foresee what that self-sufficient and stubborn youth was capable of doing. But whatever happened he would not yield, and he would permit no longer that vain method of life, with its mad excesses, excesses which are costly. But in those recent hours everything, not excepting Maryan, had concerned him considerably less than before. Why was this? He did not answer that question, for he heard a noise of steps, and a whisper: "Aloysius!"

He looked around. It was Malvina greatly changed. Beneath her hair, dressed with stern simplicity, her forehead was furrowed with a dark, deep wrinkle; the corners of her pale mouth were drooping; on the back of her head a heavy roll of hair, coiled carelessly, dropped to her dress of black material, which was almost like the robe of a religious. She stood in the descending darkness, some steps from him. She had pronounced his name, but was unable to go further. Her white hand, resting on a small table, trembled; her head was inclined, and she raised to him eyes which were dim but had a painfully timid and anxious expression. They looked at each other for a moment, and then he inquired:

"In what can I serve?"

The question was polite and formal. After a moment of hesitation, or of collecting her strength, she began:

"Irene and I are to leave here in a few days. It is impossible for me to do this without speaking to thee, Aloy-

## The Argonauts

sius. I have waited for a convenient moment, and seeing thee here, I have come."

She was silent again. She breathed quickly, and was excited. Standing toward her in profile, the definite and sharp outline of his face was fixed on the background of the window, beyond which was darkness; he inquired:

"What is the question?"

She answered in a whisper:

"Be patient—this is hard for me——"

And as if fearing to exhaust that patience for which she was begging, the woman began hurriedly, and therefore without order, to say:

"A common misfortune has struck us—thou hast been, Aloysius, so kind, so immensely loving to our poor Cara—when I go from here with Irene, thou wilt be so much alone—Maryan has some project of travel—so perhaps—if it were possible—if thou couldst forget the past—I do not know even—forgive—if thou shouldst wish, I and Irene would remain——"

While speaking she gained some courage; some internal motive was to be felt in her, which forced her to speak.

"I will not try to justify myself before thee, Aloysius, nor to deny that I am guilty—I will say only this, that I, too, was unhappy, and that my fault has caused me dreadful suffering. I wished to say to thee, Aloysius, that, perhaps, even on thy part also, for thou didst not know me—that is, thou didst know my face, my eyes, my hair, the sound of my voice, and they pleased thee, hence thou didst make me thy wife, but thou didst not know my soul, and didst not wish to be its confidant, or its defender. This soul was not devoid of good desires; not without some small beginning of heartfelt happiness—though it was the unfortunate soul of a woman attacked by wealth and idleness. But

## The Argonauts

thou, Aloysius, didst make a rich woman of a girl who, though poor and a toiler, held her head high—thou didst make her a rich and unoccupied woman, who—was left to herself at all times. Still, it was thy wish and demand that I should represent thy name in society with the utmost effect; thy name; thy firm, as thou didst call it.”

She was silent, for her eyes met his smile which was bristling with pin-points.

“It seems to me,” said he, “that in this tragic piece which it pleases thee to play, the rôle of villain will fall to me.”

“Oh, no!” cried she, clasping her hands. “Oh, no! I did not wish to complain of thee in any way, or to make reproaches—I have not the right—but—I think that since all of us in this world are guilty in some way, and life is so sad, and all is so—poor, it would perhaps be better to forgive each other—to yield, to renounce. This is what I think, and though my pride is wounded this long time because all that I must use is thine, I yield, and I will use it, though my only wish is to go from here, to withdraw from the world, to vanish forever in some lonely corner——”

Her voice quivered, shaken by sobbing, but she restrained herself and finished:

“I will renounce this desire, and remain, if—only thou wish—if only thou wilt not despise me——”

With his profile outlined more and more sharply on the window-pane, which grew darker from the gloom, he answered, after a moment of silence:

“I have not the strength for it. I am very sorry; but in me is not stuff to make the hero of a Christian romance. Thou hast perfect freedom of movement; Krynichua belongs to thy daughter. Thou mayst vanish with her in that ‘lonely corner,’ in which I cannot wish pleasant lives to

## The Argonauts

you, or remain and live here as hitherto, which I could understand better; but in no case——”

He stopped suddenly, and was silent.

While speaking with that woman he had felt beneath his throat a coil of snakes stifling him, but in his brain certain memories were sounding, as it were voices, the echo of something distant. This echo issued from that woman's features, changed and faded, though the same in which on a time he had fixed his eyes with rapture, from the sound of her voice, which, at all times, had possessed for him a charm beyond description. His head, as if pressed by something above him and invisible, dropped with an almost indiscernible movement. Shall he forgive? And what would the result be? An idyl? Harmony? A return to family happiness? Folly!

That can never be. Only one thing in this world is undoubted and indestructible: a fact. A fact has taken place, and there is no power in existence to cause that fact not to be. All views except this are exaltation! After a moment of silence he finished coldly and with deliberation:

“In no case can my feelings, or our relations be subject to change.”

She rested her hand against the table more firmly, and bent her head lower—through that head were still wandering certain thoughts of a return to pure womanly honor through expiation, through yielding obediently to the will of the offended.

Then she began in a very low voice:

“Can I aid thee in any way?”

After a moment of silence he answered:

“No.”

“Can I be of use to thee in anything?”

He was silent a little longer, and said:

## The Argonauts

“No,” a second time.

The profile which had been turned to her was looking now through the window-pane to a ruddy cloud, which was moving on in darkness above the roof opposite, that cloud reminded him of something. She looked at him, and, after a moment, added:

“Our daughter will write to thee, Aloysius.”

He interrupted her, hurriedly:

“Thy daughter!”

She began in astonishment:

“Irene——”

He knew now that that ruddy cloud moving over the darkening sky reminded him of Cara. He turned his face toward the face of the woman standing there.

“Irene is thy daughter,” said he—“for what meaning have blood-bonds when there are no others? I had a child who was my own——”

At that moment desire for revenge boiled up in him; the desire to crush, so he finished:

“And I lost her—through thee!”

“Through me?”

Her questioning cry was full of amazement.

“Thou knowest of nothing then? They have hidden it from thee? A proper regard for the delicate nerves of a woman! But my rude nerves of a man feel the need of sharing this knowledge with thy nerves.”

Slowly and emphatically he uttered his words; words which, from moment to moment, were hissed through his pallid lips, and thus he concluded:

“Once thy daughter had an interesting conversation with me; a very interesting conversation about—everything which took place in our family idyl. The little girl, hidden behind some furniture, heard the conversation, and became

## The Argonauts

mentally disordered—oh! temporarily, of course, and this would have passed, but under its influence she exposed herself to the cold night air so as to die. Inflammation of the lungs was complicated by mental disorder. Her death—was suicide.”

The last words went out of his straitened throat in a suppressed whisper, still they were so definite as to be heard in every part of the great chamber. They were deadened, however, by the overpowering shriek of the woman and the noise made as her body fell to the floor. Pani Darvid's knees bent under her, and dropping, with her face in her hands, her head struck the corner of the table near which she had been standing. At that moment Irena shot into the chamber; like a skylark, flying forward to defend its little ones, she ran to her mother, and surrounding her bent form with both arms, she raised to her father a face covered with a flood of tears.

“A needless cruelty, father,” cried she. “Ah, how I hid this from her; how I tried to hide it! This is a needless cruelty! I thought that a man as wise as thou would do nothing so uncalled for. But thou hast committed a vile-ness!”

Darvid made an abrupt movement, but restrained himself, and with his face toward the window he heard the retreating footsteps of the two women. There was a second of time during which he turned his head, and his lips moved as if some word, a name was to escape from him. At that moment the two women, holding to each other, moved slowly through the next drawing-room, advanced in the increasing darkness, and vanished. He uttered no word. What was his feeling when she shrieked and struck her head against the edge of the table? Was it pity? Perhaps. Was it a quiver of sorrow for that past which had left him forever,



## The Argonauts

and for that daughter who went out with the word "vileness" hanging on her lips? Perhaps. But he said nothing; he uttered no name. He remained alone. It was silent around him and empty. Emptiness occupied that part of space beyond the window, for the rosy cloud which had passed there a while before had vanished. The figure of Darvid standing at the window became darker in that gloom, which, growing denser, dimmed and then concealed the white, the blue, and the gilding of the great drawing-room. By degrees the lines of his face became invisible; his trembling hands and the quiver of the skin on his cheeks were no longer to be distinguished, and Darvid appeared on the gray background of the window as a narrow and perfectly black line. He did not go away, for he was riveted there, fixed in thought, filled with amazement. In this way, in this manner then, all things on earth are ended. Those invisible giants, Death, Insanity, Anguish, Rage, go about the world trampling, crushing, rending, and no man has power to arrest them! He had never thought about those giants. How could he? Was he a philosopher? He had not had time to think. Now he was thinking, and at the bottom of his stony meditation he beholds a pale, dreadful visage. Something which recalls a Medusa-head, which he had seen some time in a picture. It has struggled out of raging waves, and is resting on them face upward; its hair is torn; its gaze has endless depth; and on its blue lips is a jeering smile. What is it jeering at? Perhaps at the grandeur of the man who appears as a narrow line on the gray background of that window, black, and alone as he is, in the gathering gloom and the silence?

Now something soft and timid touches his feet, and he sees a little dark point moving. He stoops and calls:

"Puffie!"

## The Argonauts

At the floor was heard thin barking. Puffie had always barked that way to call the attention of his mistress.

Darvid bent low with his hand on the silky coat, and repeated:

“Puffie!”

Then he straightened himself, and, leaving the window, called several times in succession:

“Puffie! Puffie!”

The black line moved on, in the gray darkness, through two drawing-rooms, and behind it, on the floor, rolled the dark small ball-like object, till a space of bright light gleamed before them. This was the widely open door of his clearly lighted study.

In the door the footman pronounced loudly a name, at the sound of which Darvid's step quickened. At last the man had returned—the envoy, the agent, the hound had come back! Beyond doubt he brings favoring news, otherwise he would have no cause to come. Hence, that colossal business; that immense arena of toil and struggle, through which an enormous vein of gold runs, may belong to Darvid. How timely this is! The business will freshen him; snatch him out of the evil dreams into which he has fallen for some time past. Indeed, all these exaltations, all these elements of feeling, which have risen in him with such power, are an unwholesome and nervous dream, out of which he must shake himself and return to clear, sober, sound reality.

## CHAPTER XI

A RATHER long series of days had passed when Darvid entered his clear, brightly lighted study, after winning one of the very greatest triumphs of his life. In the antechamber he had thrown into the hands of a footman, not his fur, but a somewhat light overcoat; for that day, which for him had been lucky, was succeeded by a warm, spring evening. Whoever might have seen him when he was leaving the lofty threshold of the highest dignitary in that city must have said to himself: "Happy man!" Though he had grown evidently thin during recent days; gladness and pride were beaming from his smile; from his eyes; from his serene forehead. He possessed now that for which he had striven long in vain: he held in his hand the colossal enterprise; before him was a broad arena for iron toil and a great vein of gold. It is true, that while making ready for that moment of triumph, he had spent days and nights like a Benedictine over piles of books and documents, calculating, combining, covering many folios of paper with arguments and figures. He had toiled immensely, thinking of nothing save the toil; and now, when he stood at his object as a conqueror, all people said: he is happy! He had received a multitude of congratulations already; in the eyes of men he had read much admiration. He had just returned from a meeting where, by accurate and fluent speech, he had convinced and won over a numerous assembly of men of uncommon keenness and significance. Thus had he passed the day; now, in the middle of the evening, he returned to his house; and when he had given the servant in

## The Argonauts

attendance the brief command: "Receive no one!" he asked:

"Where is the little dog?"

After that he dropped into a deep armchair near the round table, and had the face, for a while, of a man who is waking from sleep. For a number of days he had been so buried in thought over this weighty enterprise, and that day from early morning he had been so absorbed by the feeling of that victory which he had won, that he had had no time to think of any other thing; now, after a long time, in the first moment of inactivity which had fallen to him, he felt as if waking from sleep, and he was brought to thinking by the question:

"Well? What is it for?"

Just this question was to him at that moment reality, while every other thing was accomplished by the power of habit. He had toiled, calculated, triumphed, just as a round body rolls over an inclined plane by the force of acquired motion. Under this surface-life, which had been the one which he had led so long exclusively, was now another one which seized a continually increasing area; this new life, a mystery to every other man, had become for him more tangible than the entire visible universe. Out of it was growing an irresistible, importunate riddle, enclosed in the brief words: What for?

These two brief words kept returning to his mind during every moment of rest, so that hours of noise and movement seemed to him a dream, and only those two words—unceasingly recurrent—the one true reality over which there was reason to be anxious.

Why had he taken on his head and hands this new burden of toil, which was greater than all the others? Why, in general, this climbing a sky-touching ladder with exertion

## The Argonauts

of all his strength of nerve and brain? To what kind of heaven could he climb upon that ladder? New profits, ever-increasing wealth? But he had ceased to desire these! Although that seemed marvellous to the man himself, he had ceased really. Why? Did he own little? He was the possessor of enormously much. He had never been of those who make a golden chariot so as to sit in it with Bacchantes and with Bacchus. But pride? He laughed. Yes, pride, but that was before he had known, intimately, those giants who sit in various corners of the earth. He knows them now; he knows what they can do; and he knows his own power. Why toil? What for? But his worth; that worth which people esteem so immensely that they almost cast themselves at his feet, or do they cast themselves before his golden chariot? For, if that chariot were to shoot away from under him, would he retain the title of modern Cid, Titan, superhuman? It was wonderful with what clearness he saw then Maryan, sitting in that chair, and how distinctly he heard his voice inquiring: "What is the object of your toil, father? The object; the object? That decides everything. What was the object? Of course, not this world's salvation!" He laughed again. What cause was there for long thought here! His object had been to win new profits continually; to gain ever-increasing wealth; and now, since he had ceased to desire these, the question was—what for?

But the genius of that Maryan with his questions! He had gone down so deeply into his father's being that those questions remained there and continued their inquisitorial labor. A beautiful and genial fellow! A young prince; almost a sage. But what does that signify if—he lacks something? What is it that he lacks, and so lacks that he is as if he had nothing? What is it that he lacks?

## The Argonauts

With a slow movement, in which weariness was evident, Darvid turned his head toward the desk, which was lighted abundantly with tapers burning on lofty candlesticks. What did those candlesticks bring to his mind? Ah, yes, he remembers! On a time he gave one of them, in the inner drawing-room, to Cara, so that the candle burning in it might light the way to her. He remembers how her slender arm bent beneath its weight when her small hand took it, and how beautifully the flame of the candle was reflected in the dark pupils gazing at him with such—with such what? With such exaltation! But how wonderful, how intense was his happiness when that child lived and loved him as she did! That was his only happiness! Then, holding the light in the heavy candlestick straight on before her rosy face, she went on into the darkness.

Again he looked around, not with a wearied movement as before, but abruptly. He looked around at the door beyond which thick darkness was hiding, impenetrably, a series of drawing-rooms. This darkness was like a black wall outside the door. Along Darvid's shoulders ran a movement of the skin, the same as a man feels when something heavy from behind is placed upon his shoulders, or rides onto him. That black wall, in which an enchanted row of empty drawing-rooms stood silent, seemed to put itself down on him. But again he looked toward the desk; there, among a multitude of papers, lay a letter from Maryan, received many days before. Darvid had not destroyed or put away this letter, and not knowing himself the reason why, had left it on the desk there. The letter, in that great study, appeared definitely with its white color on the green of the malachite writing utensils. Moreover, it was not a letter. A number of lines merely. He had written that, wishing to spare his father and himself a new personal interview;

## The Argonauts

he gives notice, in writing, of his trip to America. But as he is slow to write letters he confines himself to a few words. Since an incomprehensible lack of logic in directing his life had forced him to become a laborer, he desired to choose the field and the manner according to his own individuality. He had turned his personal property into money; this had brought him a considerable sum; he had borrowed another sum; he did not ask pardon for acting thus, since this borrowing was the natural outcome of a position of which he was not the cause, but on the contrary the victim. He makes no reproaches, since he is ever of opinion that all such things as offences and services, crimes and virtues, are soup prepared from the bones of great-grandfathers, and served in painted pots to Arcadians. All this was concluded with a compliment which was smooth, rounded, exquisite as to style, plan, and execution.

Lack of logic. Those three words had fixed themselves in Darvid's memory, and after the words "what for?" appeared in it most frequently. Could they really relate to him? Had he in fact committed an error in logic? Yes, it seemed so. In that case his clear, sober, logical reason had deceived him. He rose, and with his profile toward the door, felt again, rather than saw, a black wall of darkness beyond. Again a shiver ran along the skin of his shoulders, which quivered and bent somewhat. He went to the desk, from which he took another letter, thrown down a moment before, and unread yet. Something in the room was moving; certain little steps ran along the carpet quietly. Puffie had woke; had run to the man, and begun to squirm at his feet.

"Puffie!" said Darvid, and he began to read the letter. It was an invitation from Prince Zeno to a grand farewell ball. The prince and his family were going abroad, and



## The Argonauts

wished to take farewell of their acquaintances in the first rank of them with the "modern Cid." Prince Zeno had often given this title to Darvid. But to-day the "modern Cid" read the letter of invitation while his mouth was awry from disgust. It had not the famous smile bristling with pin-points, but simply that disfigurement of the lips which accompanies the swallowing of something which is nauseating and repugnant. He placed before his mind the society in which some time before he had passed a few days at the hunting trip. This society would fill the prince's drawing-rooms on that day, and not only did he note in himself an utter absence of desire to be in that society, but a repulsion for it. Not that he cherished hatred toward those people, but they were perfectly indifferent to him. He did not reproach that society; but when he thought of it he was conscious again of a boundless space and a vacuum, which divided him from those who formed it. He imagined to himself Prince Zeno's drawing-rooms filled with faces, costumes, conversations, card-tables; and, it seemed to him, that it all existed at an immense distance—on the other side of a space that was infinite and empty—on one edge of this space was he; on the other were they; between him and them lay a vacuum; no bond between them; not even one as slender as a spider-web.

In the midst of the lofty chamber, above the round table, burned the lamp with a great and calm light; on the desk, in massive candlesticks, burned candles. In that abundant light Darvid stood near the desk, with bent shoulders; a number of wrinkles between his brows; his face inclined low toward the paper which he held in his hand. At his feet, on the rug, like a tiny statue, sat the motionless Puffie; with upraised head, and through silken hair, the dog looked into the face of the man. But Darvid did not see the little ani-

## The Argonauts

mal, and did not read the flattering phrases on the paper; he only repeated the words which, on a time, he had heard from his daughter:

“What do you want of so many people, father? Do you love them? Do they love you? What comes of this? Pleasure or profit? What is it all for?”

“I do not love them, little one, and they do not love me. Profit comes to me from this—significance in society.”

“But what is significance to you, father? What do you want of significance? Does it give you happiness?”

This time there appeared on his lips the smile full of pin-points, which was famous in society.

“It has not given it, little one!”

His child had let down on her question his thought to the basis of life, as if on threads. Now he looked around, and his smile was bristling with pin-points of irony, increasing in sharpness. He thought a long time before he said, aloud:

“What comes of this?”

And afterward, in an inquiring tone, he almost cried:

“An error?”

In the light of this thought that his life with its toils, its conflicts, and its triumphs could be an error, he saw, again, that Medusa-face, pale with terror.

Puffie, perhaps frightened by the cry which had been rent from his master, fell to barking. Darvid turned from the desk, and his glance met the black wall beyond the door.

“Was it an error?” he repeated.

The darkness was silent, and a face without eyes seemed to gaze at him persistently, with attention. He moved forward a few steps quickly, and pressed the bell-knob. To the incoming servant he indicated the door, and said:

“Light up the drawing-rooms!”

## The Argonauts

After a few moments the series of drawing-rooms emerged from the darkness, and stood in the light of blazing lamps and candles. Globe-lamps, burning at the walls, cast a hazy half-light, in which glittered, here and there, golden gleams, and appeared the features of painted faces and landscapes. From shady corners emerged, partially, the forms of slender and swelling vases; portions of white garlands on the walls; the delicate mists of dim colors on Gobelin tapestry; the bright scarlet and blue of silk drapery. Farther on, in the small drawing-room, burned, in two chandeliers, a bundle of tapers, beneath which hung a crown of crystals, glittering like icicles, or immense congealed tears. Farther on still, in the dining-room, with its dark walls, gleamed a bright spot in the grand lamp of pendant bronze above the table. This point seemed very distant from Darvid's study; but on the whole expanse which divided him from it there was neither voice nor sound—there was nothing living. Notwithstanding the multitude of objects scattered, or collected, this was a desert on which silence had imposed itself.

From the threshold of the study to that door, beyond which the largest of the lamps was suspended as a shining object in its bronze above the table, Darvid moved, stepping with inclined face; at his lips the fire of a lighted cigarette; now, as it were, extinguished; and, now, shining up again. Behind him, right there near his feet, with the end of its snout almost touching the floor, rolled along little Puffie, like a bundle of raw silk.

After a while, the step of the advancing man grew more hurried and uneven; increasing disquiet was expressed in him; now the light scattering along the unoccupied and silent space the extent of that space, and he himself wandering along through it. What did all this signify? Here and there, in the gildings and polished surfaces, quivered

## The Argonauts

flashes like playful gnomes; at other points, on bluish backgrounds, pale faces looked from tapestry thrown over furniture; still, farther, a great mirror reflects two clusters of lights, beneath which hang crystal pendants, and, increasing the perspective, made the space still greater, and the light more peculiar; in another place, from behind bluish folds depending from a door, appears a vase of Chinese porcelain; and, at that moment, it assumes, in Darvid's eyes, a strange appearance. Large, covered with blue decorations, it has a form which is swollen in the middle, but slender above, with a long neck, and not altogether visible; it seems to lean forward from behind the curtains, gaze at the passing man, follow his steps, and laugh at him. Yes, the Chinese vase is laughing—its body seems to swell more and more from laughter, and in the blue painting the white background has, here and there, a deceptive similarity to grinning teeth. Darvid strives not to look at the vase, and hastens on; behind him Puffie's shaggy feet tread the floor more hurriedly, but as he returns, the porcelain monster thrusts out its long neck again from behind the curtain, jeers, bares its teeth, and seems ready to burst from laughter. At the opposite side of that drawing-room, on a blue background, is the pale face of an old man, and from above a gray beard the sad and inquisitive eyes of the patriarch are settled on Darvid.

What does all this mean? Darvid halted in the centre of one of the drawing-rooms, right there behind him the bundle of raw silk halted also, and stood on its shaggy paws. What was he doing in those empty drawing-rooms; why had he commanded to light them? This act seems like madness. He called to mind recent acts of an insane king, who, in a brilliantly lighted edifice, listened alone to the rendering of an opera. Is he also becoming insane? Why is he

## The Argonauts

not at work? He has so much to do! Darvid advanced quickly, and halted again. The Chinese vase inclined half way from behind the curtain, it seemed bursting from laughter. Work? What for? The object? The object? That decides everything! He turned his glance from the gnashing teeth of the Chinese monster, and it met the pale face of the patriarch, whose eyes, looking out at him from the blue background, and from above a gray beard, said with sadness, and inquiringly: "The wrong road!"

He had lost the road! Only the habit of restraining internal impulses, and the expression of them, kept him from crying "Help!" But he had the cry within him, and with a quick and uneven tread he went toward the great lamp burning at the end of the perspective, in the centre of the open space between the walls of the dining-room. Behind him ran along Puffie, with all the speed of his shaggy feet.

Meanwhile, in one of the drawing-rooms, the clock began to strike eleven—one, two, three. Its deep sounds penetrated slowly the empty space on which silence had imposed itself, until somewhere, at the other end of the perspective, a second clock began to strike, as if answering this one in a thinner voice and more hurriedly. This seemed a voice, an echo, a conversation carried on by things that were inanimate.

Darvid returned to his study, and pressing the knob of the bell again, said to his servant:

"Put out the lights!"

He sat in one of the armchairs at the round table, and felt an unspeakable weariness from the crown of his head to his feet. Some light body sprang to his knee. He placed his hand on the silky coat of the creature nestling up to him, and said:

## The Argonauts

“Puffie!”

He considered that he must renounce absolutely that colossal affair to obtain which he had struggled so long, because strength, and especially desire for such immense toil, seemed to fail him. He was so tired. But if he abandons toil what will he do; what is he to live for? What is the object of life?

The darkness was silent, and as a face without eyes seemed to gaze on him with stubbornness and attention.

A few hours later, in a sleeping-room, furnished by the most skilled of decorators in the capital, a night-lamp, placed on the mantle, cast its light on a bed adorned with rich carving; a hand, white and thin, stretched forth on the silken coverlet, and a face, also thin, with ruddy side-whiskers, itself as if carved out of ivory, and gleaming with a pair of blue, sleepless eyes, which wandered through that spacious, half-lighted, chamber with a tortured and heavy expression.

All at once Darvid raised himself in bed, and, with his elbow on the pillow, gazed upward. Higher on the wall was the face of a maiden, small, oval, rosy, with thick, bright hair scattered above her Grecian forehead, and by a movement of her eyes she seemed to summon the man gazing at her. She smiled, with rosy lips, at him, lovingly, and moved her eyelids, inviting him. Darvid, with raised brows, and with his forehead gathered in a number of great wrinkles; with eyes turned to that picture above him bent forward still more, and, with trembling lips, whispered: “My little one.” But immediately after he rubbed his eyes, and smiled. It was a picture by Greuze! There were two of them: one almost invisible in the shade; the other that one emerging from the shade into a half light in such fashion that the head of the maiden seemed to stand out from the canvas as it were suspended.

## The Argonauts

It is like Cara; very like her. The same type—the very same lips, hair, and forehead——”

He knew that that was a painted face; still, with his head on the pillow, he raised his eyes to it frequently, and as often as he raised them he saw a loving smile on the rosy lips and the distinct movement of the eyes which seemed to call and invite him.

He thought that he was ill, unnerved; that he must summon in physicians. Next morning Darvid heard, in the study of a famous doctor, that his nerves were unstrung remarkably; suffering from a blow which had struck him—over-work. He had toiled beyond measure. There was only one cure: complete and long rest. A journey abroad. A change of impressions, after hard and special toil; life in the midst of splendid scenery and works of art.

Meditating afterward on this advice of the doctor, he thought that he had not the slightest wish to follow it. Neither nature nor art attracted him in any way. During his whole life he had not had the time for them, and it was too late now for new studies. Why was he to undertake a journey if not for that purpose? He had travelled much in his lifetime, but always on business, and with a clearly defined object; without business and an object, travelling through the world seemed to him exactly like that walking in the night through his empty, lighted mansion; something akin to madness.

What then? Days passed again in toil, amidst consultations and reckonings. The arranging of balances and reports—the round body rolled on by the power of impetus. At appointed hours he received visits. He received also Prince Zeno, who came to take farewell of him for many months, till the following winter.

“We are scattering, all of us,” said the prince. “Like



## The Argonauts

birds in autumn we are flying to places where the sun shines most beautifully. You, too, will go, of course. Whither? To the South or the East? Perhaps to that estate where your wife and daughter are passing the sad time of family mourning? But apropos of the country. You know that poor Kranitski; well, he came to take farewell of me. He has left the city; left it never to come back again. He has gone to the country. He is to remain on his estate—a small one, not over-pleasantly situated. I was there once on a visit to his mother, with whom I was connected by blood-bonds. A tiresome little hole, that place! But what is to be done? This handsome and once charming man has grown dreadfully old; the conditions of his life were difficult—so he has gone. Your son is making a long journey. Is he in the United States already? Baron Blauendorf is going there also; only yesterday he bade good-by to us. We scatter through the world; but, till we meet again? For I should be in despair were I to lose an acquaintance so precious and dear to me as yours is.”

Ah, how indifferent it was to Darvid whether he should keep or lose acquaintance with Prince Zeno. He saw and recognized in the man many fine and agreeable qualities, but he would rather not see him, just as he would rather not see others. All seemed strange to him and distant. Conversation, even with the most agreeable and worthy, both wearied and annoyed him. “What do you want of so many people, father? Do you love them? Do they love you?”

One thought now devoured him. That “poor Kranitski” had left the city to live on his estate permanently, or rather in his poor village, situated in that same district as Krynichna, not very near, but in the same region. Of course, he will be a frequent guest at Krynichna—but, maybe not; even, surely not. Indeed, she had broken with him, and,

## The Argonauts

in truth, she felt immense shame and pain—he laughed. A penitent Magdalen! He finished with the thought: Unhappy woman!

But what more had he to do that day? Ah! he had an appointment to meet that young sculptor at the cemetery toward evening, and agree on a monument for Cara. That was to be a monument of great cost and beauty—a mountain of gold above the “little one.”

The great cemetery was in the bright green of leaves which had recently unfolded on the trees, and in the intoxicating odor of violets over Cara’s grave-mound, which was covered with a carpet, not of modest violets, but of exquisite exotic flowers. Darvid spoke long with the young sculptor, and with a number of other men, giving, agreeably and fluently, opinions and directions concerning the erection of the monument. While doing this, his eyes dropped, at moments, to the grave, and were fixed with such force on it as if he wished to pierce through that carpet of flowers; through the stratum of brick; through the coffin, and look at that which was under the lid. At last, with a polite elevation of his hat, he took farewell of them, and passed on by a path, amid columns and statues intertwined with a lace of bright leaves, into the centre of that broad city of the dead. That was his first acquaintance with such a city. He had seen a multitude of other such cities, but had never become acquainted with one of them. He had looked into them sometimes, but briefly, and because he was forced to it—his head was ever filled with thoughts altogether foreign to such places. Now he passed the interior of the cemetery with this thought. So all ends here! He did not go out for a long time. His carriage, with cushions of sapphire-colored damask, and his pair of splendid horses stood long before the cemetery gate, obedient and motionless. In the chapel

## The Argonauts

tower the silver music of the vesper-bell sounded, and ceased to sound. Darkness had begun to fall on the fresh green of the trees, and the urns, columns, and statues standing thickly between them, as Darvid drove away from the cemetery.

"When church-bells sound, as this has, people pray," thought he. "Do they think that God hears them? Does God exist? Perhaps he does. It is even likely that he does, but that he occupies himself with men and their entreaties!—I am not sure. I have never given time to this, and it seems to me that no one knows. Men have wrangled over this question for ages and—know nothing. It is a mystery. All places are full of mystery, but men think that reason is a great power. That is an error! Whatever ends thus is misery. Everything ends in stupidity. All things are foolishness! foolishness!"

Reaching the steps of his mansion he thought that he felt greatly wearied. Is this old age? not long before he felt perfectly youthful. But, evidently, this is the way—Age comes and seizes a man. One giantess more—it seems to him that he is a hundred years old. The same with Malvina. How changed she was when he spoke last to her. She had preserved her youth so long, and on a sudden she was aged. She must have suffered greatly. Hapless woman!

He entered his study; sat down at his desk. Puffie sprang onto his knee immediately. He put one hand on the coat of the little dog, and with the other opened a drawer, looked into it, pushed the drawer back, and, resting comfortably against the arms of the chair, gazed into space with a fixed, torpid look.

He was too wise not to see standing, earlier or later, before him, the stern irony existing in human affairs. It had been standing before him for a long time, but, stand-

## The Argonauts

ing behind veils, such as labor, success—the eternal lack of time. Now the veils had fallen. He beheld the irony clearly. It was embodied in the swollen vase of Chinese porcelain, which, though not standing in that chamber, seemed to bend forward from the corner, with sloping eyes painted in sapphire. The figure leered at him; bared its white teeth, and with swollen body seemed to burst from laughter. What could he place against that monster? how was he to cover it?—he knew not. He understood well that at the bottom of this all lay an error. On the road of life there was something which he had not noted; something which he had not recognized; he had let something slip from his hands which still were so rapacious; he, an architect, observing with mighty diligence the law of equilibrium in buildings reared by him, had not preserved that equilibrium in his own house; so that now it was hard for him to dwell there, and he wished to depart from it.

When he goes it will be better for all. Better for him and for them. That unhappy woman will be free, and may become happy. Maryan will return from the end of the earth to receive his inheritance, if for no other reason. Irene will reappear in society. Irene, what a strange character!—so deeply tender, and so insolent. How savagely she hurled at him the word “vileness!” But she was right. He had committed that moment a vile act, just as in general he was forced to commit many follies—but “useless cruelty” will give reward—Irene will learn that he was not so—no, neither she nor anyone will know the nature of his act. He raised his head, in which he felt once more an access of pride. No, he will not give account of his motives to anyone; nor confess on his knees, like a penitent sinner; nor will he take the pose of a hero. Let them think what they like. How can that concern him? Nothing concerns him.

## The Argonauts

By chance he raised his eyes and saw, hanging in the air, the face of a maiden, oval, rosy, and bright-haired which smiled at him lovingly, and made a clear motion, inviting him. Greuze's picture was not there, still the vision was present. With eyes raised toward it Darvid smiled.

"Yes, little one, quickly."

He took a pen and began a telegram to Irene. He penned the address, and then wrote: "Come as quickly as possible for Puffie." He put the pen down, rang, and told the footman to send the telegram immediately. Then, passing his hand over the coat of the sleeping little dog, he sat long, sunk in thought. The world appeared before him with all that he had ever seen, owned, or used in it. Countries, cities, nations, their dwellings and languages, banks, exchanges, markets, offices, noise, throngs, struggles, horse-races, movements, uproar, life. This vision did not halt there before him, but sailed away, as it were, on a giant river, ever farther from him; farther, till it was on the opposite shore of a great space, entirely cut off and entirely indifferent. When he considered that he might spring over that space and mingle again in all those things, repulsion came on him, and also fear; he shook his head in refusal, and said to himself: "I do not want them!"

He was very calm; an expression of happiness began to spread over his features. If anyone had seized him then and tried to hurl him to the side of that broad space on which this life is situated, he would have resisted with all his might, and, if need be, would have begged to remain on that other side.

He looked up and smiled.

"Now, my little one, I am coming!"

He opened the drawer.

\* \* \*

## The Argonauts

Next morning news flew through the city like a thunderbolt, that the renowned financial operator and millionaire, Aloysius Darvid, had, during the night, in his study, taken his own life with a revolver. The first and universal thought was of bankruptcy. But no. Soon it became clear and most certain that his ship, in full canvas, was sailing on the broad stream of success, and was bearing an immense, glittering golden fleece. The Argonaut, however, no man knew for what reason—through causes hidden altogether from everyone—had sprung from the deck into the dark and mysterious abyss.

THE END.









UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**A** 000 125 553 8

